

The Valley of the Great Shadow





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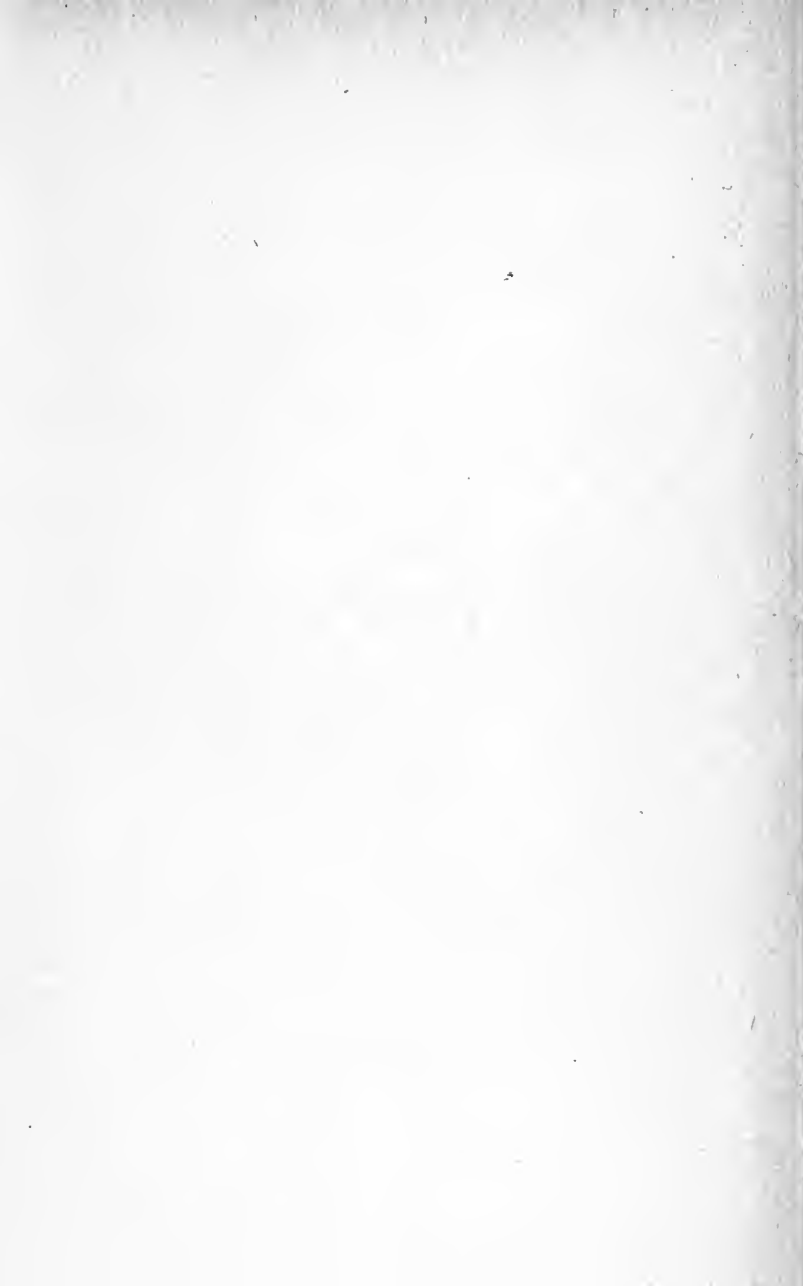
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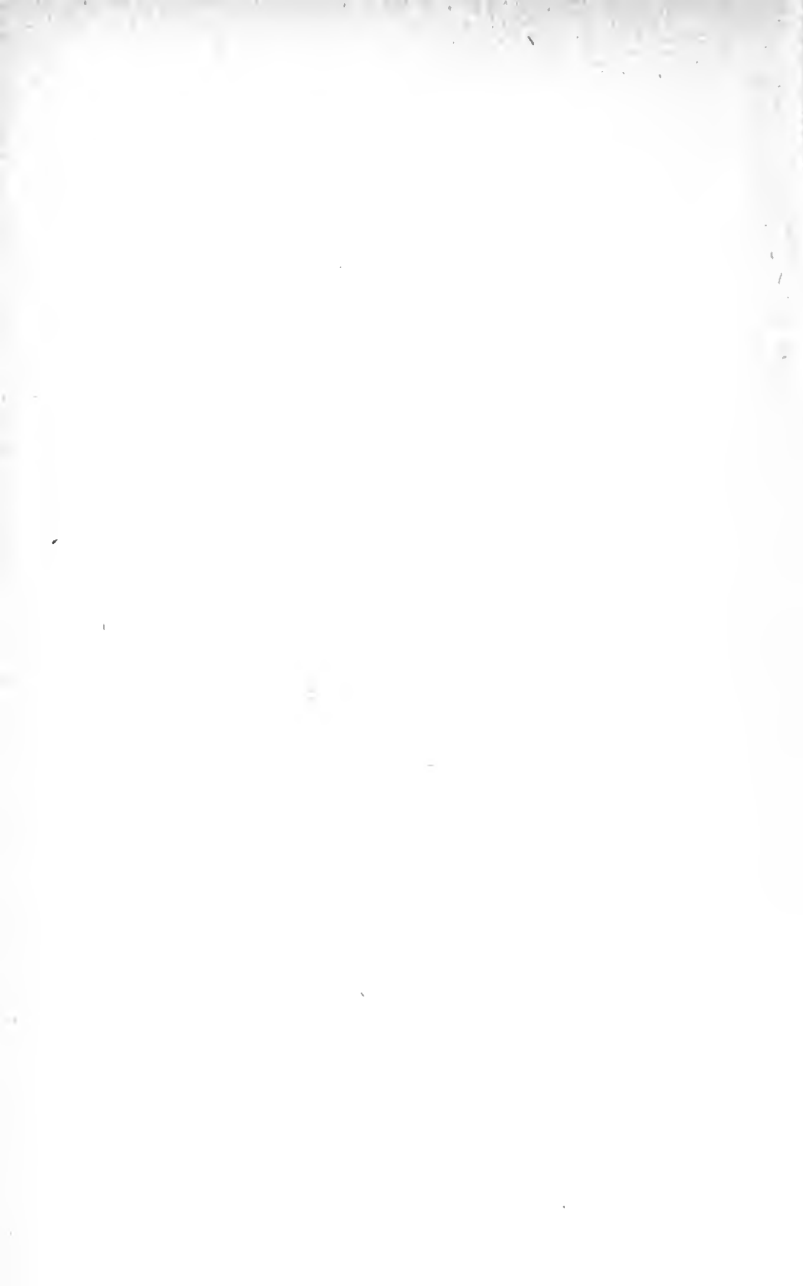
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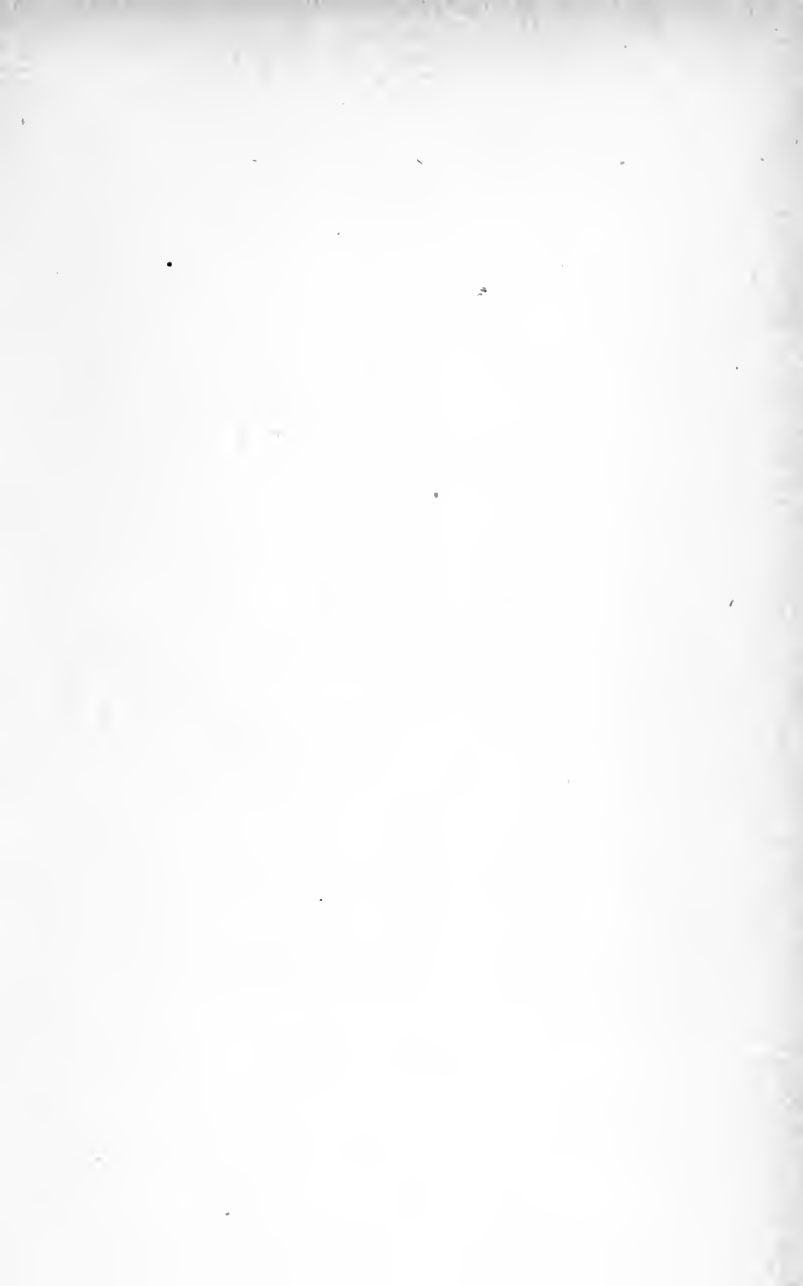
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The Valley of the
Great Shadow

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BY

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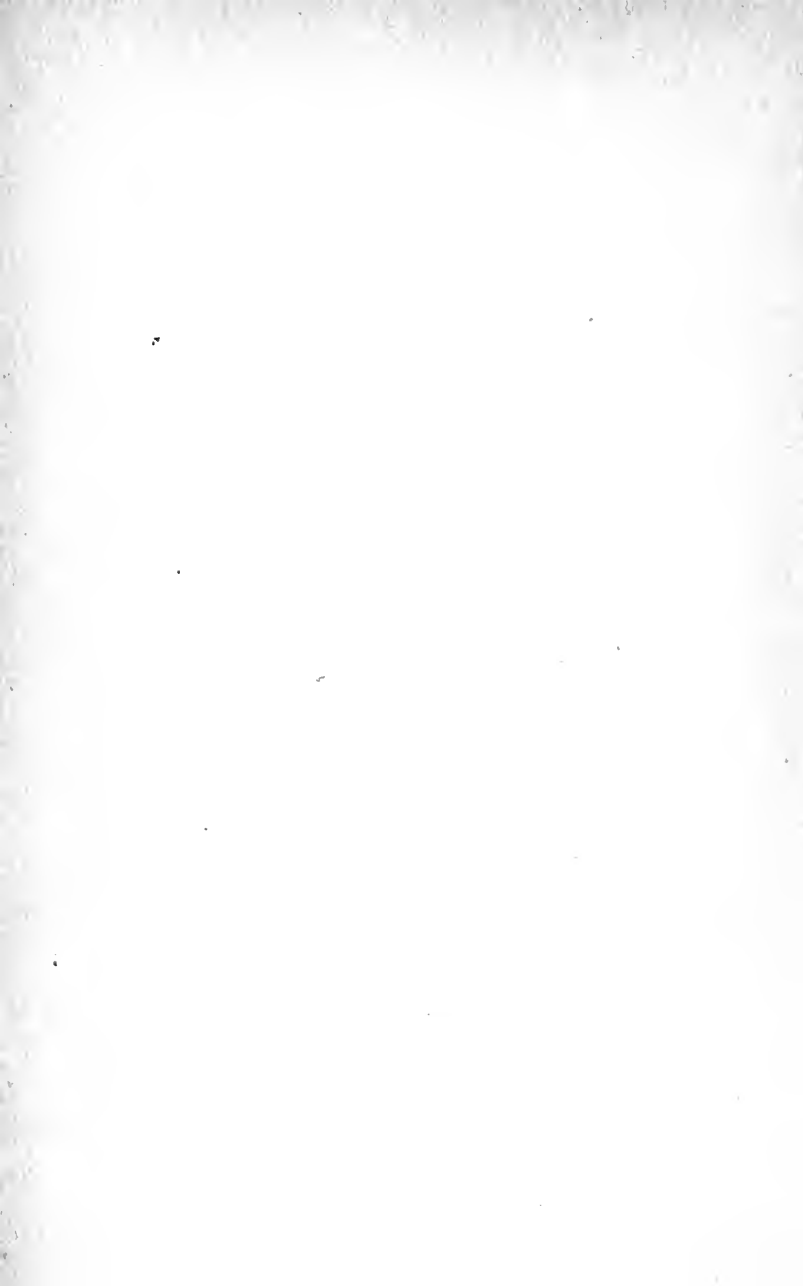
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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. DOCTOR ENGEL - - - -	I
II. PHILIPPA ALCESTIS - - -	27
III. SONNIE - - - - -	44
IV. BABETTE - - - - -	62
V. MERRIDEW - - - - -	84
VI. THE PROFESSOR - - - -	102
VII. MISS BLAKE - - - - -	124
VIII. MR. JERNINGHAM - - -	141
IX. SIMPLICITY - - - - -	166
X. MARIE - - - - -	186
XI. THE ROYSTONS - - - -	297
XII. MISS BUSYBODY - - - -	236



The Valley of the Great Shadow

CHAPTER I

DOCTOR ENGEL

I

“Good-bye, Philippa. I leave you to the care of the good Doctor.” The whip cracked again. Colonel Joy smiled from the diligence window. The girl on the road made a movement of disdain.

“The good Doctor! A horrid German icicle in spectacles! If that is all my consolation, I will go to England with you.” Her foot was on the step, but her father shook his head.

“No, no; you must stay here and grow strong. I shall be lonely enough—a whole month without my girl—” His voice failed. Philippa stepped back and blazed up at him.

“Lonely?” she cried, passionately. “And what will it be for me, left alone with nothing but snow and pines”—she gulped down her tears—“and a doctor of ice?”

“Snow and pines?” said her father, cheerfully.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

"Don't you remember that Miss Blake said they meant death and immortality? The ice will melt in the sun. Be patient."

The driver cracked his whip for the last time. Philippa shook herself determinedly, and called back the light to her face.

"Good-bye, dear," she smiled. "Don't worry about me; I will console myself with the good Doctor."

She kissed her hand, and her father brightened. This little girl of his had courage enough to face more than loneliness, he knew.

He was smiling still when the sleigh dipped round the curve. Philippa's eyes showed conflicting lights—remorse, petulance, spirit.

"Poor dear," she thought; "I didn't mean to let him see how I hate to be left in this doleful place—sick people, perpetual snow, gloomy pines, and a doctor as silent as the grave, and as cheerful. It's a brilliant prospect."

She dwelt resentfully on the thought, and tilted her head, repeating, "Good Doctor!"

"That is the man in a phrase," she said to herself. "How unspeakably dull it sounds!—as dull as himself."

She thought of Dr. Engel's stoop, for he carried his height awkwardly, his brown hair, the blonde beard and moustache hiding his large mouth, the hands that touched so lightly, the shabby clothes always well brushed. The por-

Doctor Engel

trait contrasted unfavourably with that of her London doctor.

She walked back to the Hotel Royal, between the ranges of pine-covered hills that bounded the Alpine valley.

The snow was blossoming into crimson, and where it met the sky a delicate tracery of pines laid a crown upon it. At sunrise and at sunset an individual life came into the trees, so that each needled point pricked solitary against the glow. When the light passed they closed together again and wreathed the summits with a heavy chaplet. From the Catholic chapel came the sound of the Angelus. The sunset burnt red on the chalet windows, and flashed on the panes of the hotels, but Philippa did not notice it. Her face was gloomy; her eyes protested against the month's desertion.

She turned into the Royal, and walked on to the balcony. It would be empty at this hour, when the invalids always went to their rooms. To-day it was not empty. She met the Professor, shuffling along in his snow-shoes, his bear-skin over his shoulder, his eyes peeping from a fur cap.

"Met Dr. Engel on the road?" he asked Philippa.

"I have not," she answered, shortly. "I don't concern myself with Dr. Engel's movements."

The Valley of the Great Shadow

"Might do worse," he grunted. "Engel could tell you more about everything than any man you ever met."

"Well, he ought to," she said, disdainfully. "He has been buried in books all his life."

"But you might have been buried in a library for a century, and still you would know nothing," said the Professor, blandly.

"I know that you are very rude," said Philippa, pouting. She liked the Professor. He was the only man of her acquaintance who did not pay her compliments.

"Engel's a clever man," the Professor went on; "but even he could not put any sense into your small head. Didn't I hear you calling him a fossil?"

"Very probably," said Philippa, yawning. "And it is likely you will hear me call him a fossil again. He is hard enough to belong to the stone age."

"Engel hard?" shouted the Professor. "Engel? Engel, of all men?" He looked fiercely at Philippa. "Didn't I say you had no sense, you little empty-headed firefly?"

"You did, Professor. But a woman needn't be foolish because she is pretty."

"Fiddles!" said the Professor. "Pretty or plain, she always *is* foolish. Engel hard? Bless my soul! I've known him all my life. He's a friend of mine, Miss Butterfly."

Doctor Engel

"Two crusty old bachelors! You have to be friends with each other, because no woman will be friends with you."

"Eh, eh? What do you say, you shrimp? Isn't Miss Blake a friend of mine? And aren't all the women in love with Engel? 'The dear Doctor, the charming Doctor, the angelic Doctor'—haven't you heard them?"

It restored the Professor's good humour to mince over the feminine accents.

"He would be good-looking if he didn't look so good," said Philippa. "He is something like the pictures one sees of Christ."

"Yet a minute ago you said he was hard!" She covered her ears with her hands.

"I am heartily tired of hearing that man's name," she cried. "It is enough that he is nothing to me, and hideous. Let us talk of something pretty."

"I knew you wanted to talk of yourself," chuckled the Professor. Suddenly she threw out her hand appealingly.

"Ah, don't, Professor! I'm really very miserable. Daddy has just gone, and I am here all alone."

She looked as if she were going to cry. The Professor edged away nervously.

"And I am here all alone, too," he said.

Philippa turned away and pretended to look at the sunset. "Bless my soul! God bless my soul!"

The Valley of the Great Shadow

He shuffled after her, and pressed a large yellow bandana into her hand.

"Haven't you a handkerchief, child?" he said, testily. "Here, take this; I hate to see a woman cry untidily."

She looked at the gaudy square, and laughed. "Oh, Professor, how absurd! I don't want your handkerchief."

She dashed her own across her eyes, and looked defiantly at him. "If you dare to tell any one you saw me crying—"

The Professor's eyes had traveled from the balcony to the road. Philippa's followed them, and saw Dr. Engel coming towards the hotel.

"I am going in, Professor. It's dangerous to stay out after sunset," she cried, and left him.

The Professor hurried away to his interview with the Doctor. It was not strictly professional. The two men sat talking of "Men and Women" and other books. Before they parted, Dr. Engel knew that Miss Joy, one of his most charming patients, thought him a hard old fossil.

On the balcony of her private sitting-room Philippa stood, her face pinched and grey, gazing out at the white valley and the white hills, and the night of the pine wood. Overhead a single star hung against the blue, and from the valley came up the sound of the Grünwasser.

The river moaned under the weight of the ice

Doctor Engel

that edged its banks, and the note caught the girl's mood. It seemed to be the one living thing in the silence, and it gave a voice to the pain and despair and hope that under the weight of death flowed in a human stream through the valley of the Mittenthal.

Philippa had been long enough at Mittenplatz to know it. "A winter health-resort" was a baldly humorous description of the place where Death and Life waited together for the bodies of men.

Death and Life stood sentinel at every door in the village; they were the lacqueys that served at the dances and dinners; and Death waited on this one, and Life on that. They sat in every sleigh as it jangled gaily over the snow, and sometimes Death drove, and sometimes Life. And no one saw that the men who swept the lake for the skating were Death and Life, or knew that Death froze the toboggan-run down which Life swung into the valley.

When the snow flashed in the sun like silver, and the jodels rang cheerily across the silence, people forgot the sadness of the Mittenthal. But at night they remembered; for then Life slept and only Death watched. And then the cold was a naked sword hanging over the valley, and the snow was a shroud on the fields, and the mountains were the graves of magnificent ambitions.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

Then those who looked up despairing could see spread out the great wings that threw their great shadow over the valley.

It was not yet night, but the shadow rested on Philippa. She closed her hand over the balcony rail as if it was the bar of a cage that she would crush.

"I hate the place!" she said, with a half-sob; "I hate the people, with their hopeful faces and their smiles and their sunburn that looks like health and is not. I hate the ghostliness of the snow, the stealthiness of death when it comes. It is all so pathetic. And the glad sun, and the gaiety, and the music outside the Kurhaus are a horrible mockery. And if you do, forget that people are dying round you, the awful silence of the mountains reminds you of it. There they stand, watching the endless march-past of Death's captives. And yet how beautiful it is. The great solemn white hills teach one to be calm and patient."

She leaned her head on her hand and listened to the moan of the river and to the jodelling of a peasant going home after work.

"Yes, it is beautiful," she said; "but I shall be glad when spring comes, and I can go away. This is a place for people who have lived their lives, or for creatures like the Professor and the Doctor, who have no life to live—who don't know what it is to laugh and be glad."

Doctor Engel

Then her tone changed. "Poor soul!" she went on; "he has been here for ten years, buried in snow. No wonder he belongs to the ice age. And he never has any pleasure but the pleasure of seeing his patients recover—sometimes. And he is always cheerful, and always gentle, and always patient, even when he is in a rage. How many men would live his life and not grow crusty and selfish? Ten years! And I hate the thought of a few weeks!"

She turned from the dusky pines and from the warning note of the Grünwasser, and went into the room.

The blaze and crackle of firelogs welcomed her. The electric light showed the rugs and curtains, the pictures and books and piano, with which her father had made her sitting-room cozy.

No one in the hotel had such luxurious rooms. It was as much as most people could afford to have a south room and a balcony. Philippa had two sunny rooms and two balconies, though she was not really an invalid. But she gazed at the comfort in the room as a prisoner might have gazed on the stones of his cell.

She might have amused herself even at Mittenplatz, for the life had plenty of colour and movement, and there were gay strains in the music to which the invalids stepped. There were people who were recovering, or had recovered, and their

The Valley of the Great Shadow

friends, and the roads were always cheerful with sleighs and toboggans.

There were balls and tournaments and dinners in the hotels. In the Mittenthal, Death wore the livery of Life, the master masquerading as the servant. But Philippa had seen the face under the mask, and she chose to be quiet, and to have only the delight of nature in the air that intoxicated like wine. She had promised her father to make the best use of the curative influences of the place. He was over-anxious for her in his dread of the disease to which her mother had been sacrificed, and Philippa was not robust.

Sitting alone in her room that night after dinner, she began to realize her loneliness without her father. And he would be lonely, too. She knew what it had cost him to leave her, and a strong desire for life, for his sake, filled her thoughts.

"I would rather suffer anything than see him suffer," she said to herself. "I could bear any loneliness myself rather than leave him lonely forever."

Then she lifted herself and laughed a strenuous little laugh. "But I am not going to die; I feel the life in me strong, strong, overcoming death. I am not patient and bright and gentle, like the people who can't recover; I don't love the valley as an earthly paradise, as the

Doctor Engel

poor souls do who are not eager for the heavenly—I hate it. When I leave it I shall go into lovely places to make up for the exile I have suffered here.”

She bent forward and looked deep into the fire, and a smile broke across the determinedness of her mouth. What should she do when she left the Mittenenthal? What should she do? Live, of course; live royally, pressing out the wine of life from her vineyard. She would walk there with the gods. Yellow sun and green vine and brown earth should borrow the richer colours of the past. The love given to Laura and Beatrice should sweeten her grapes; the wisdom of Hypatia should flavour her cup; the songs of Sappho should echo in the shouts of the vintage. At dawn the dreams of the saints, of Catherine and Cecilia, would shine among the misty vines. She would do brave deeds, fight with Joan of Arc, be martyred. She would taste the passionate innocence of the Cenci. Her vineyard should yield purple grapes.

She did not see the knots on which the clusters hung, the misshapen roots from which trailed delicate leaf and tendril. She demanded the glory and beauty of life, the pomp of passion. And they belonged to the knotted strength of defeat and the blank days of loss.

She frowned as a knock at the door made the vision vanish. Dr. Engel came in and stood

The Valley of the Great Shadow

before her, crushing his felt hat in his hands, a new nervousness in his manner.

He did not speak at once. Philippa looked at him wonderingly. Her eyes were still the wide, deeply lighted eyes of one who has just seen a vision, and the intensity gave force to her face. Was she the spoiled child he had known, mirthful and provocative, weeping stormily on the hotel balcony?

His surmise flashed vividly against the cold steel of the news he carried.

"I have bad news for you," he said in English, which he spoke as well as he spoke German. Philippa started up, her breath arrested.

"Daddy?" she cried.

"Yes. I have to tell you—there has been an accident—they have telephoned—"

"Dead?" she whispered, shrinking from his pity.

"No; but hurt."

"How dare you—frighten me?" she gasped. She drew a long, shuddering breath, and the red surged back to her face.

"I thought he was dead!" she laughed, nervously. "Hurt? My poor darling! Where is he? I'll go at once." She caught up a shawl and twisted it round her. "Is he much hurt?"

"Not so fast. He is at Lansing. You must wait till morning for the diligence."

Doctor Engel

She paused at the door, turning her head. "No; I'll have a sleigh. Come—please come—"

"No, no!" the Doctor cried, quickly; "the road is impossible at night—dangerous. One can't drive."

"Then we must walk. Oh! what are you doing, wasting time?" she went on. "Don't you know how he will want me? And you, too; he must have the best doctor—come." Her figure was tense in command.

"You can't go," Engel said. "A strong man might make the walk through the snow, but not you—twenty miles—and the cold—"

"You will come with me," said Philippa. She threw her head back, the gesture of a person suffocating, and went up to him. "Please come with me."

"Ach was?" He put his hands behind him and fell back from her pleading.

Her surprise at the movement accused him of cowardice. He was a coward, he knew; he might yield because she had called him a hard man. He steeled himself, and his silence repulsed her.

"Very well; I'll go alone."

She walked to the door, and he hesitated. After all, her father would scarcely live through the night. He stopped her at the door.

"Look then; I will drive you. It is no doubt madness. What then?" He shrugged his shoulders and looked doubtfully at her.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

"Yes, yes! Oh, Dr. Engel, don't waste time. Get the sleigh. Let us start—"

"Patience," he said, gravely. "In ten minutes I will come. Change your gown—put on many wraps. We shall be frozen."

Ten minutes after, the Professor and Miss Blake were in the hall to see Philippa start. The lights flashed out on the road. The bells on the horses tossed the silence in little drifts about their heads. When the cloaked and hooded figures had been swept into the night, Miss Blake turned to the Professor.

"Poor darling!" she said, tremulously. "I trust she will find that it is not so serious. There is something very touching, Professor, in seeing the two set out in the starlight to face the great shadow of death."

"Touching? A pair of fools, ma'am! They can't see their road. They will freeze in an hour. If Engel was not such an obstinate fool there might be a little hope. But he will fall over a precipice rather than own he has lost his way."

"Philippa is with him. She will help him; she is so wise and strong. She has great character; I admire her judgment. Don't you think they will arrive safely, Professor?"

"Humph!" grunted the Professor.

Doctor Engel

II

The difficulties of the road did not exist for Philippa, though she knew the ice-track down which the horses must stumble and slide, dangerous at noon, at midnight a menacing peril. It was nothing to her that they must plunge into pitch blackness, feeling their way on the edge of the chasm that slipped away from the road. It was nothing that they must creep under the rocks, holding their breath, stealthy and silent, lest the pent snow should wind its shroud round horse and sleigh and traveller. It was nothing that the horses might reach Lansing in safety, and the two figures in the sleigh be frozen to their seats. Calm and silent she sat beside the Doctor, whose brows were set over eyes probing the distance.

It was not yet utterly dark. Splashes of electric light made pools upon the mile of road between Mittenplatz and Pitzen. The Kurhaus at Pitzen was still awake. Above the lights, on the Pitzenberg, people were tobogganing. Their laughing sounded pleasantly under the sparkling stars. Engel spoke to the horses, and they dashed up the Pitzenberg and down again into the plain of the Pitzensee. The lake slept its winter death-sleep. The great tombstones of Schwarzberg and Weissberg marked where it

The Valley of the Great Shadow

lay. There was no sound in all the vast silence but the clash of the sleigh-bells.

Now Philippa had time to dwell on her father's accident. Engel's meagre details had only fed surmise and alarm.

"Dr. Engel," she suddenly broke silence, "I want to know exactly what has happened to Daddy."

Engel frowned. He wished to spare her the knowledge that tightened his throat and made the twenty miles between Mittenplatz and Lansing a long-drawn-out dread. "Fatally injured. Only just alive," still clanged in his ears.

"It is impossible to say. The message was that he had slipped from the diligence in alighting. The telephone was short."

"If he could telephone, it can't be so very serious," said Philippa, thoughtfully.

Engel busied himself with the horses, floundering waist-deep in snow. The lights streaming out showed the drift; the air slashed like knives across their faces.

Philippa shrank into her furs, but Engel hung forward. She could see his moustache frozen, the rime on eyebrow and lash. His hands held the reins as if they, too, were frozen.

Whatever she might suffer from the cold, she saw that he would suffer more, and a light remorse flitted over her thoughts. Ought she to have insisted on this mad journey? The first

Doctor Engel

diligence from Mittenplatz would be at Lansing eight hours after them, and if her father were not in danger—

For herself she was glad that she had come. This weird progress downward, through snow and pine and midnight, made her tingle with new sensations. She was excited, conscious of Engel's tense attitude.

Then they sprang into the night of the pine wood, and blackness closed over them with a rush as of meeting wings. Involuntarily she pressed closer to him. She felt his glance towards her. His voice was gentle in spite of its hoarseness. It sang above the squeal of the drag on the sleigh-runners. "You are not afraid? You are warm still?"

"I should be afraid if you were not with me, but not now."

"That is very well," he said. Her answer pleased him.

"You like, then, all this?" he went on.

"Yes; it is all so strange and terrible. Those white pines look like processions of ghosts. But there is life in the bells, and in the creaking of the sleigh, and now and then you can see a star. Dr. Engel, tell me, do you think we shall be able to take Daddy back with us to-morrow?"

"I cannot say."

Then he began to tell her of life in the Mittenenthal. How the winter, with its snow and its

The Valley of the Great Shadow

invalids, passed, and the ice in the valley melted, and everywhere the song of living water tinkled. And how the flowers came, long successions of colour passing over the vivid green of the meadows; and how the gentian dyed the slopes, and the alpen-roses lit their fires in the woods where in the white winter-time Death and Life walked together.

And Philippa smiled to herself at his German sentiment. She liked to listen to him. He dwelt like a schoolboy on the delights of the summer fields. It was a curious theme there in the winter midnight.

"In the midst of death we are in life," Philippa said to herself, listening to the voice that sang above the squeal of the drag or fell brokenly among the jangle of the bells.

Now and then he spoke to the horses, or got out to help them through a drift; and then she could tell from his tone how every thought was clamped round the risks of the mountain road. They were travelling slowly, stealthily, the horses feeling every step of the way. Philippa knew the steepness of the road by the set of their haunches.

The lights of the lamps touched the snow on either side, and called out flashing fires from the crystals. But behind them was the night and before them the midnight.

The Doctor got out again and encouraged the

Doctor Engel

horses, who trembled, feeling the edge of the ravine. The shriek of the drag was like a human cry, the background for his words. Philippa wondered at the way in which he spoke. She had only seen him in the nervous reserve of his professional mood. Now she echoed the Professor's astonished, "Hard? Engel hard?"

Would they never get down those dreadful slopes? Would she ever lose the sense of giddy height and giddier depth? She dared not breathe, feeling the balance they kept on the slippery ledge. The beat of a pulse might shatter that difficult poise.

The tension began to tell on her. She watched the white processions stealing towards them with silent, mysterious steps, and she could have shrieked. The cold numbed her. She was paralyzed, bound in living death.

Soon the stars were blotted out. The darkness swathed them round and round. About them there was nothing but the armed cold and the silence of the forest

She found herself longing unutterably for Engel's voice, but she hid her terror.

When the road widened he took his seat again, and bent down to her. "Almost asleep?"

"No. Oh, I ought to have waited! I ought not to have let you come."

"So? But—well, then, I was myself going to Lansing; yes, even alone."

The Valley of the Great Shadow

"Oh, Dr. Engel!" The intonation of the name was eloquent. Suddenly she caught his arm. "Because you thought it serious—you were going?"

"I wished for myself to see how serious. But now can you hold the reins while I warm my fingers?"

"Ah, yes!" she cried, eagerly. "I will drive. Your hands must be frozen. See! Put them in my muff."

When he would have taken the reins again she refused to give them up. Finally he ceased entreating, and took them from her by main force. After that there was silence. Engel was too vexed at her obstinacy, Philippa too offended by his action, to speak.

All at once the sleigh swerved; there was a muffled cry that died away in his ears and left a soundless space.

When consciousness came back he was lying in a drift, half-suffocated. His first thought was for Philippa.

He fought down the snow, struggled to his feet, and groping blindly, clambered to level ground. There were no lights. He stumbled against the sleigh lying on its side. The horses were quiet. Not a breath stirred the shrill silence. His heart became like ice. How long had he been lying stunned? Was she dead?

Doctor Engel

She must be dead! He gave something like a sob. "Du armes Kind! du armes Kind!"

A quick, tremulous laugh answered him.

"Call me what names you like, only speak."

"Where are you, where?" he shouted.

"Here, holding the horses. I've been calling you for hours."

He groped his way to her. She was leaning on a pine-trunk, the reins twisted round her arm. He thought he heard her teeth chattering, but he must have been mistaken. When she spoke her voice was brusque and steady.

"I couldn't look for you, you see. The horses might have bolted. I thought I had better hold them, so that if you were really dead I could go on to Lansing."

"So?" he said, stupidly. Then sharp and insistent came a desire to have some share in her solicitude. The spark that night's work had kindled was fanned into flame by her unconcern for him.

He lighted the lamps and harnessed the horses to the sleigh, and they took their seats again, Engel driving, straining his eyes to keep the difficult path.

His great sigh of relief made Philippa aware when the worst danger was passed. They had come to level road. Thereafter the way wound gradually towards Lansing.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

Her thoughts were with her father, but across her anxiety flashed strange lights in which she saw Engel's face.

That speech of hers had been brutal. If he had been killed, could she have left him?

"Dr. Engel," she said, suddenly, "it was not true. If you had been killed just now, I would not have left you."

"So? But I did not think you would," he laughed. The hearty sound shook the darkness round them. "Tell me, then, you weak little one, what could you have done?"

"I would have sat beside you till morning."

"But then, have you no fear?"

"I should have been so sorry I wouldn't have felt anything else."

The silence that fell after that throbbed in his ears with noisy significance. He did not speak again till his exclamation roused Philippa. "Gott sei dank! it is Lansing at last!"

The lights buzzed about the diligence station. Philippa sprang up, but his hand detained her.

"Wait till I come back to you."

She was frozen. Her teeth chattered while she waited in that long, long minute of his absence. He came back.

"Little one—little one—"

His voice broke, and a new, fierce cold took hold of the girl and made her shiver in every muscle.

Doctor Engel

"He is dead," she whispered.

Engel carried her into the hotel, where a fire was burning, and where the porters stood, hushed and sympathetic.

He loosened her furs, rubbed her hands. They brought hot brandy, and in a little while she struggled to her feet.

"I must go—I must see—"

"I will first go. Wait for me."

He beckoned the men away. Philippa sat dazed and stunned. He came back again, and she followed him to the room. In the same horrible dream she found herself turning from what she saw and clinging to Engel's arm. It was only for a minute. She drew away, and stood steadily.

"I will stay here," she said, in a thick voice.

Engel's lips opened, but the look on her face decided him. He went out and left her.

The swift, chill hours passed; the hours that travelled so fast they were years, changing the girl into the woman. And yet what long, slow hours they were of uttermost anguish.

At six o'clock Engel brought her some coffee. She rose from her knees beside the bed and drank it, choking. His face moved her.

"Haven't you been to sleep?" she asked. Even her voice was changed.

"But I was not tired," he said. Then he told her what he had done, speaking softly. She

The Valley of the Great Shadow

listened, half understanding. The only thing clear was that she could start for England in a few hours. Engel had assumed that she would wish to take her father home.

"I wish with all my heart that I could have gone with you," he said, "but I will telegraph to your relatives to meet you."

She lifted her smitten face.

"I have no relatives," she said, blankly.

"Your friends, then."

She shook her head, smiling pitifully.

"None, either, near enough. Daddy and I never wanted any one else."

His glance strayed to the pillow, crumpled where her head had rested beside that other head, back again where she stood, frail and small and lonely.

"What then?" he said hoarsely, when he found his voice. She looked at him. He turned away, but she had seen the tenderness and pain in his eyes.

A wave of emotion broke up the calmness of her face. It passed, leaving her still more white and shrunken.

"I told you a lie yesterday," she said. "If you had been killed, I would have gone to Lansing without you. I wouldn't have stayed with you. You were nothing to me; Daddy was everything."

The voice echoed curiously in the hollow

Doctor Engel

silence of death. She held herself proudly a moment.

Suddenly she ran to the bed and gathered the dead man in her arms and pressed her face to his, moaning.

Engel walked to the window, moved and distressed as he had not been before in all his experience of sorrow. He drew the curtain aside, and stood there, seeing nothing. But the night had been cloven through by a stroke of dawn. Already the east was awake.

He gazed out, wrestling with himself, the words it would be wiser to leave unsaid. Then he stepped to her side and touched her gently.

"I will take him to the Mittenthal—to sleep in the peace of the snow and pines. And you—and you—"

He could not bid her go back to England, where she had no friends, and he would not ask her to return to the Mittenthal. He distrusted himself. And long ago he had said he would never trust a woman again.

His silence spoke louder than speech; but Philippa was listening to another voice: "*Snow and pines. Death and immortality.*" Strange that they were almost the last words her father had said to her. And what else had he said? "*I leave you to the care of the good Doctor.*"

She stood up and gazed searchingly into Engel's face, and read the distrust, the pity, the

The Valley of the Great Shadow

strength, and the weakness that battled together there.

"I thought—I would have liked—to go back—to the Mittenthal," she faltered.

"As you please, of course," he answered. His tone startled her. She looked at him dismayed. She had reached out her hand to her friend, and it had struck a wall of ice.

Her face and figure stiffened; she turned proudly away. What were the last words her father had said to her? "*The ice will melt in the sun. Be patient.*"

When she spoke again there was a new quality in her voice that set Engel at a great distance from her—outside the circle of her obligations.

"I have decided to take my father to the Mittenthal, Dr. Engel."

CHAPTER II

PHILIPPA ALCESTIS

There was one grave more in the *friedhof* of the Mittenthal—that pathetic burial-place where the sleepers are young. Gathered together from all nations, they rest in the high valley under the shadow of the Alps. The moan of pines is their requiem. The stars light the graves; the snow folds itself round them.

There was one grave more—a black gash in the snow. Philippa stood beside it while six feet of relentless earth set their bars between herself and her dead. She was not conscious of what was passing. The sun fenced the grave with a lattice of rays. The ice-crystals were in blossom, rainbow flowers of the snow. There was a waveless sea of blue overhead. Deep called unto deep; the unplumbed depth of those six feet answered the unfathomed depth of the blue. But in the girl's heart was a deeper deep, whose silence cried aloud and stayed not. The grave was almost full. The thud that had echoed among the gravestones was growing more muffled. Death had struck a silence through

The Valley of the Great Shadow

earth's voices, and life had been quick to fill up the void.

Philippa stood there till the coverlet of snow was spread over her father and the men who had committed earth to earth had gone away. Miss Blake and the Professor and Simplicity Baldwin had been at the service in the church, but only Dr. Engel had gone with her to the *friedhof*. He stood apart, watching the little black figure, solitary in its setting of dead people. He had watched many mourners round other graves, but none had touched him as this girl touched him. His glance stayed with her ashen face, the underlip fallen, a white line below the whiter line of the teeth. She did not strive nor cry, but youth had gone from her.

He had no comfort to give her. He needed comfort himself for the pain of his powerlessness. Suddenly the tinkle of bells rained through the silence. A gay procession of sleighs was passing the *friedhof*. The horses were festooned with scarlet and blue, the harness shone with gold. In each sleigh sat a young man and a girl, the betrothed lovers of one of the villages keeping their yearly *fest*. Their voices and laughing filled the morning. Engel had frowned at them ten times. To-day he frowned at them more than ever.

Some one blew a *reveillé* on the horn, and Philippa looked up, startled into life.

Philippa Alcestis

The wreaths of colour, the red and yellow kerchiefs of the women, the shining harness, struck a crude contrast with the cold white mound that was her world of pain. She shuddered at the noise of the horn. No *reveille* would ever wake him again.

She stumbled along the path to Engel's sleigh. He took the seat beside her, and told his servant, Jakob Meyer, to drive to the Hotel Royal.

The bells of the other sleighs jangled before them, at first in the distance, then nearer and louder. Jakob Meyer pulled up. A snowdrift had fallen across the road, and it delayed the procession of lovers. When they started again Engel and Philippa were at the end of the cavalcade.

Engel half smiled; he could afford to smile, he thought cynically. He had served Philippa with the generosity of a man for whom there could be no danger in a woman's friendship. Death had drawn them together for the moment; life would assuredly estrange them. After this he need not see her again.

But the next day he stood at Philippa's bedside watching her, his face grave, the lines round his mouth rigid.

He was used to fight with death. In the Mit-tenthal the grim fight was fought month by month, day by day, and his arm had sometimes decided the contest in a patient's favour.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

She was delirious. Now and then broken words fell among her moans. "*I have trodden the winepress alone.*" "*Lover and friend hast thou put far from me.*"

It wrung his heart to hear her, but face and voice did not relent from their reserve. Miss Blake, sitting beside the girl, wiped her tears to look resentfully at him. "You are a hard man!" she said to herself. "How can you listen with that face? You have no heart."

Even the Professor was vexed with Engel in these days. He wasted his time waiting in the corridor for the Doctor to come out of Philippa's room; but when he asked anxiously for news of her, Engel would pass him with a curt, "It is a snowy day. Good morning."

Simplicity Baldwin made a bet that she would force him to answer her questions; but she lost two hours among the crowd in his waiting-room, and paid a Napoleon for the consultation, and came away defeated. Engel refused to discuss his patients with each other. He did not spare himself in watching Philippa's case: Night after night he sat up listening to her delirium. It was pathetic to guess the story of her devotion to her father, to see glimpses of her nature unconsciously laid bare. Listening to her he forgot the bitterness that had embittered his life. A woman had shattered his faith in womanhood. Looking into Philippa's soul, he was compelled

Philippa Alcestis

to believe in woman again. One night, sitting in the shaded room, he caught himself wishing that he had met Philippa before Isolde had ruined his life.

The weakness was only momentary. He drew himself up, and his mouth twisted cynically. He would never trust a woman again. Women had no honour, no truth. They were liars by instinct. Even Philippa had lied to him.

Every day the fight with death grew grimmer. Philippa hovered between two worlds. The crisis was near, and Engel only left the room to see his other patients. Miss Blake and Simplicity Baldwin and the nurses relieved each other; but he took no rest. He scarcely gave himself time for food. He snatched sleep in a chair beside her. So he held the reins of life, and never relaxed his hold until the danger was passed.

On the day when she opened her eyes with recognition in them, he could not trust himself to speak. He held her hand, counting the beat of the pulse while his own heart-beat deafened him. When he lifted his head again the cynical smile was under his moustache. He gave a sharp order to the nurse, and went away. Miss Blake looked after him reproachfully. "He has no heart," she whispered.

"My!" Simplicity Baldwin exclaimed under breath, "I would as soon expect to see feeling in

The Valley of the Great Shadow

a cast-iron stovepipe. He's a perfect cheesemite of a man, but he's a giant of a doctor."

That night Engel sat in his study, his knitted brows contradicting the softness of his eyes. At last he got up, pushed his chair back, and tossed the hair from his forehead. The gesture had in it the decision of youth. He looked round the room, at the books lining the walls, the books piled on the chairs, the books hiding the carpet. They were his trusted friends of years. Tonight their faces were blank. He pulled his beard with impatient fingers, and his glance wandered round and round the room. It was dull and exceedingly lonely. He felt restless and unstrung after the tension of the last days. He missed the toss of a restless head on a pillow, the sight of a white little face, the sound of a tender voice. He thought over the events of the day, pacing up and down.

His glance was arrested by the mirror over his desk. He paused before it and studied himself. He saw a face with a mouth hidden by the close-cut blond beard, deep eyes overhung by a fell of brown hair, a brow lined deeply. Then he saw that the eyes were wistful. He turned away with a gesture of denial. Had he not schooled himself to loneliness and content? Would any woman ever give him the quiet comradeship he had found in his books? He was

Philippa Alcestis

restless to-night, but the mood would pass. It was due to the overstrain of watching. He was dissatisfied only because he missed the absorbing pathological interest of the case.

He sat in his chair, thinking. The denial had gone from his eyes; they were wistful again.

He thought of the years in which he had seen the guests at the feast of life, and had not sat at the board. The feast was spread even here in the Mittenthal; but those who had been bidden to it were the halt and the lame and the blind. Engel was among them as one that served. He had grown silent as he watched the pity of the spectacle.

The room was close. He felt stifled, and he opened the window and gazed out, whistling softly, drinking in the peace of the night. The draught was tonic and bracing. The brilliant starlight of the Alps glittered over mountain and valley. The stars that had gazed down on the death-struggle of many poor souls in the valley watched his life-struggle with kindly encouraging eyes. They soothed his mood. His restlessness passed, the whistle died away. After all, it was a good thing to live here. He was face to face with the great forces, love and death and sorrow, and life. He saw human nature at its highest, if sometimes at its lowest; and he knew, as few men, the irony, the pathos, the humour of it. He knew Death, too—Death that came

The Valley of the Great Shadow

creeping; Death that galloped; Death that waited so long that Life prayed for his coming, and even Love entreated him; Death that struck sharp and swift between two kisses; Death that passed the old man and snatched at the child before its lips had bruised the mother's breast.

He had seen Love—the Love that was stronger than Death, weaker than Life. He had looked into its blank eyes, he had turned away from its doom. And Sorrow he had known; he knew by heart every line of his twisted, ironical face. He had felt his biting humour, his bitter mirth had made him shudder. Sorrow that gathered the souls of Love and Life and Death into his hands and played at dice with them—

Who was that singing? He lifted himself, listening. Clear and sweet came the sound of music, a melody that might have been written in the score of the starlight.

It was some time before Engel recognized the sound of Sonnie Baker's violin coming from the balcony of the Hotel Royal.

The violin had been silent for the last ten days. Sonnie had had no heart to play while his friend Philippa hung between life and death. Now the notes rang out shrill and triumphant. The boy was improvising one of his witches' dances of sound. The music was bewitched. It came across the snow, gliding, floating, twisting, twirling. Now it danced with light feet,

Philippa Alcestis

springing high; now it stepped with measured precision; now it swept with wide curves about the silence; now it drifted in great waves of melody; now it tinkled in a thin stream of song. It shifted and changed with every moment, but under the melody was always the sound of dancing, the tapping of joyous heels.

Engel listened until the thing got into his head and caught his thoughts, and whirled them round in rhythm and measure. He had not written verses for years, but here were some set to Sonnie's crazy fiddling. He turned into the room, singing in a soft, booming voice, and sat down at his desk, and wrote while he sang. His eyes had grown bright, the lines on his face were smoothed out. When he finished writing he threw back his head and laughed.

The laugh echoed among the books with a hollow sound; its voice was the voice of a ghost. It startled him. He looked round guiltily; then laughed again, that the books might grow accustomed to the sound of a merry heart. Yes, surely, the glad days were coming. That crazy fiddling had charmed away the past. The gaunt old years of doubt, the rats that had eaten up his youth, had followed the music away out of the valley, beyond the snow, beyond the night. He would never feel their teeth again. He was free to love. Youth was before him, and life, and love—and love!

The Valley of the Great Shadow

He read his verses over again; then, proud and shy all at once, he wrote the title, "To Philippa Alcestis."

He had written on one of the slips he kept for his prescriptions. He laughed shyly to see love verses on the paper he used for ordering bitter draughts. It was all wrong, of course. He must write them on rose-petals, tinted with sunrise, perfumed with dawn. But he had some note-paper somewhere. Where had he put it? It was so long since he had written anything but prescriptions he had forgotten that he possessed note-paper.

He got up hastily and began turning over the drawers in a hurried hunt for the paper. He tossed over the contents recklessly. The paper was certainly somewhere! What was this rubbish? A withered sprig of greenery. How had it got there? He took up the little branch. The leaves fell and scattered a faint sweetness about the room. The rosemary struck him like a blow. He sat down, a slash of pain showing across his eyes. He covered his face, but he could not shut out the picture of the Italian garden, with its rosemary and lavender bushes, its olive trees and pale pink roses. Was it indeed only ten years since he had loitered about the monastery garden among the flowers? It must surely be a hundred years since he had taken that journey to Florence to bring home his bride. Isolde was

Philippa Alcestis

there, waiting for him. They had not met for a year. He had been too busy passing his examination, getting a practice, furnishing the house, to visit her. Now everything was ready for the little wife.

He did not recognize the demure maiden in the fashionable woman he found at Florence; but the voice was hers. He would know that peculiar ringing sweetness anywhere. She had grown prettier than ever; but her gaiety clashed with his gravity. In the old days she had been grave, too. The months must have sobered him. He could not follow her butterfly flights, and he looked on them puzzled and wondering. In Berlin she had been shy, and very proud of her tall student. She was no longer shy, no longer proud, though he had taken a high degree. She objected to his beard, his old-fashioned, awkward manners. She laughed at him before Major Stannard, the English officer, and called him a German rustic. She mocked at his clothes, at his big hands and feet, his tenderness, his obedience. She put off their wedding-day, and the graver he became the more she laughed. But it never occurred to his simple loyalty to doubt her. His awakening had been cruelly sudden. She had gone to lunch with the Stannards, who had a villa outside Florence, and he had arranged to meet her at the Certosa which was near the villa and bring her back. He

The Valley of the Great Shadow

wanted to see the quaint old monastery, and he set out an hour before the time of the appointment, meaning to go over the place before she arrived.

He had seen the frescoes in the chapel, and the Della Robbias in the cloisters, and he wandered about the gardens feeling the spell of the silence. Here life slept. Peace held the olive trees, the rosemary and lavender bushes—a peace broken only by the colour of the small pink roses that seemed out of place among the sober livery of the bushes.

He sat down on Michael Angelo's well. His love for Isolde struck deep through the peace, like the shaft of the well that pierced the earth. At last it touched the chill of his cold doubts.

The hour dreamed itself away. He saw the monks, white-robed and silent-sandaled, glide past him like ghosts—a dream within a dream. Outside the walls the sunlight blazed, and all the far purple hills and the white villas of the slopes seemed shouting for joy.

But under the loggia there was no sun, and the walls that shut out the world shut out also the vivid life of the summer day.

Engel, restless, unsatisfied, and foreboding, wondered if life could give anything better than the peace within the Certosa walls.

A sudden overwhelming distrust of the future had seized him. In his dim, workaday life Isolde

Philippa Alcestis

would be as out of place as were the small pink roses among the grey ranks of olive and rosemary and lavender. The sight of the roses blushing and smiling disturbed him. He walked slowly towards the chapel, and as he went he picked a branch of rosemary, whose lilac blossoms reminded him of the Isolde to whom he had been betrothed.

The chapel was very dark. Coming in from the glare he could barely distinguish the cowls of the monks kneeling before the altar. He was in a dream again, but here the vagueness and obscurity of the dream were pierced through by the poignant anguish of the figure on the crucifix. Engel took off his hat and slipped into a seat in the darkest corner. The monotone of the monks droned on, like the droning of the bees outside in the garden. Had the monks found the eternal flower which held all the sweetness of life? The cross rose from the altar tall-stemmed and white like a lily. It might be that pain and sacrifice shrined the fragrance of immortal love. His thoughts turned to Isolde; but she struck a false note in this house, where men had wrestled with the principalities and powers of passion and sin, with the world and the flesh and the devil. Little butterfly Isolde had nothing to do with nature's deeper meanings.

The breath of summer chased the shadows in

The Valley of the Great Shadow

the chapel up to the dim altar and the incense wreaths. The monks went away to the cloisters; Engel remained. He would have been content to stay there forever, and bury himself and his fear of the future in the monastery walls.

After a while thought struggled to life. The secret of peace was not here. The monks touched the fringes of the secret; they had not lifted the curtain. The sweetness of life might be shrined in sacrifice and pain, but it must be in the pain of quivering flesh, in the shudder of the blood in the veins, in the hearts of men and women, not in dead wood. No worship of a carved Christ on a dead tree, no pathos of a plaster Calvary, could give peace or take the sting from pain. Man must himself be Christ, must himself climb Calvary bearing his cross, must give himself to death, if he would taste the strength and the sweetness, the passion and the peace of Godhead. The God in the man could accept no cloister smaller than life, no order narrower than that of humanity. When Engel came out into the hot blaze his face was grey like the grey of the olive trees under which he walked to seek Isolde. He stooped like an old man.

He found her sitting on Michael Angelo's well, crowned with the roses that Major Stannard had gathered for her. At the sight a fierce, unreasoning jealousy seized him—the crown of roses

Philippa Alcestis

set her altogether outside his quiet life. His worn face was still more grey in the sun. He saw Isolde shrink from his eyes. Her self-consciousness looked like guilt. She stepped towards Stannard as if asking for protection from Engel.

He saw Stannard's swift look towards him, and his step backward from Isolde's appeal. That also looked like conscious guilt.

"Don't be afraid, Isolde," Engel said. His voice was cold and still; it had been drowned in the deep of his pain. "Don't be afraid. I am not blaming you that you prefer this man to me. I understand now why you don't wish to marry me. And I give you back your freedom."

He turned his back on her sharp cry. "I give you back your freedom," he repeated. "You will be happier with him than with me."

He took no notice of the trembling voice that called him entreatingly. He went back and hid himself in the chapel, and once again a soul hanging upon his cross rent the stillness and the night with the cry of uttermost anguish, "My God, why hast Thou forsaken me."

He stumbled down the steep hill from the Certosa, through the ilex groves, into the podere, where the contadini sang as they worked. The purple hills before him rioted in sunlight, and the white villas of the slopes shouted for joy. He turned his back upon them, and walked fiercely westward to meet the sunset.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

It was midnight when he returned to Florence. His fingers were still clenched round the little branch of rosemary. The lilac blossoms were dead. He threw it among the papers on his table. He must have brought it away with them, and it had lain unnoticed in the drawer until now.

That was ten years ago. He had found his monastery among the mountains, his cloister in the snows of the Mittenenthal. His altar was pain; above it hung the picture of Life bearing the babe Death. And here he ministered.

It was a lonely life, but its solitude had satisfied him. His books and his profession supplied interest. He lived alone, forgetting the woman who had destroyed his faith in woman, avoiding all other women for her sake. And the life had contented him until now. It would content him again. Had he not said he would never trust another woman? He was a fool to let Sonnie's fiddling charm away his wise resolutions. He lifted his head. His eyes were stern. They fell on the verses he had written; the fallen leaves of rosemary almost hid the lines.

"To Philippa Alcestis." He smiled bitterly. "No; to Isolde Alcestis. It is not Love, but Isolde, who has come back to me from the dead."

He tore the paper into pieces and tossed them with the dry twig into the fire. A piece of the

Philippa Alcestis

paper fluttered away and fell on the carpet. Engel rose impatiently and picked it up to throw it after the others. Two words were on it, "Philippa Alcestis." He saw them and he stopped. A wavering tenderness came into his eyes. Then he deliberately pushed the paper between the bars of the grate. Before the flame caught it he snatched it away again and crushed it into his pocket.

He started guiltily, and turned, hearing a noise behind him. It was only the rats in the wainscot.

CHAPTER III

SONNIE

Sonnie Baker stood at his window watching the day outside. The grey kitten sat purring on his shoulder. The morning was dull, houses and valley stood swathed. The folds of the mist were light on the hill-slopes; they thickened where the Grünwasser strove against the ice on its bank.

In the summer the river had boasted of its freedom as it clattered past the woods. It had mocked the rooted pines and the winds valley-prisoned. Now in the winter, when the pines defied the frost and the air shook out its starred banners, the Grünwasser was fettered. The ice clutched at its feet, but could not keep them, and the river stumbled moaning through the valley towards the lake in the sun.

Sonnie listened gloomily to its moaning. The mountains before him were the walls of a prison. The wreaths of mist were the coils of the rope that bound him. He could not escape, like the river, to the south. At the end of the valley the Ducanalp stood like a sentinel guarding the pass. The single fang seemed to threaten the sky.

Sonnie

He leaned his face against the window, and listened to the beat of the thoughts clanging the knell of his career.

But it was impossible that he should not get well again. It was only six weeks since he had had his great success. He still felt the thrill of the crowded hall and heard the cheers of the audience. They had recalled him again and again, and he had played till the excitement had made him faint. The faces had pressed closer and closer until they had stifled him. His violin had clattered with a great noise to the platform. Then blackness had fallen between him and the thousand faces. It all seemed so long ago. And now Dr. Engel would not promise that he would ever face an audience again.

He put up his hands and drew the kitten to his cheek. His eyes, sunken in the thin face, still shone with the genius that had been his doom. The livid whiteness of the hands against the fur caught his gaze. He studied the long artist-fingers, the knotted knuckles. Was it true? Did Dr. Engel's silence mean that his lungs were not getting better?

The Doctor had just left him. Sonnie could not forget the haunting pity he had surprised in his eyes. To die at sixteen? The boy shivered. It was very weird to face death alone. The comfortable purring of the kitten accompanied his thoughts. By and by he twisted round into

The Valley of the Great Shadow

the room. No, he would not go down to the balcony yet. Simplicity Baldwin and her Americanisms would not amuse him to-day, and Philippa Joy was still confined to her room. He did not wish to meet the echo of his doom on the faces of the other invalids. Their gaiety would be more ironical even than usual. It was easy for them to be happy in Mittenplatz. They did not sacrifice a career. And if he had to die, it would be better to go back to London and live splendidly for three months, and die crowned, than to drag out his life in a place like this.

The mountains would mock him with thoughts of the heights he had meant to reach, the pines would jeer at his hopes of fame. His heart sickened.

The mountains looked pitiless enough. The Jakob's Pitz before him stared unmoved at the boy's despair. He was so small a thing to hurl himself against the great forces. Would these human insects never learn the patience of nature, that bore the snows of winter with the same silence that carried the green burden of summer? There was a knock at the door, and Babette brought in Sonnie's glass of hot milk. She was breathless to-day. Her gasps sounded louder than Fifine's purr. Sonnie looked at her with new sympathy. He understood now why Babette was so attentive to him. The fellow feeling had come into his own heart.

Sonnie

"Look here, Babette, you are not fit to work," he said. "You look perished. Sit down and warm yourself. And here—you drink this milk. I'll get some more when I go downstairs."

He pushed the armchair before the fire, and the maid sat down gratefully. She was the woman who waited on that floor, and she was almost as ill as most of those she waited on. Sonnie talked to her while she warmed herself and drank the milk. When she went away the weight on his heart had lifted. He walked to the window again, and this time his face was calm.

Suddenly the sun shone out, and all at once the valley was transfigured. The mists rose trembling from the river and fled, torn and tattered, to the belt of pines.

He opened his window and stepped out onto the balcony. The sting in the cold was the sting of life.

He leaned against the railing and looked down towards the houses clustered round the church. They splashed the snow with colour—pink and yellow and green. They were all square and hideous, but the ugliness had been blurred by time. The road was dotted with people, little black figures moving towards the skating-rink, where the red flags flaunted. A blue sleigh, with a tail of toboggans behind it, clattered past the hotel. The bells clashed out joyfully. The

The Valley of the Great Shadow

valley had wakened, and its face was alight with life. Even the pines lost their gloom where their edges were pinked out against the glow. The snow tingled with light. Sonnie's eyes wakened, too. The eagerness came back to his face; his eyes flashed and darkened. His fingers beat on the rail, Fifine, washing her face on the floor, thought it was a game, and prepared to spring. But suddenly Sonnie turned into the room, caught up his violin, and began to play. And as he played you saw the light rosy on the peaks, sparkling and dancing on the snow. Across the moan of the Grünwasser you could hear the music of bells. He played on. At last, breathless, he put down his violin.

"Marie said it was an angel, and it's only a boy."

Sonnie started up and looked round him. The peculiar ringing intonation of the voice was unfamiliar. A child stood in the doorway, a little thing in a straight black frock. She had yellow hair and big, soft eyes. When she saw his face her eyes widened, her voice dropped.

"I think you must be an angel. That's what makes your face white and shining." Her face was awed, but she walked up to him fearlessly.

"When I'm an angel I'll play a harp, too."

Sonnie held out his hand to her. "Hello! where have you come from?"

"I've runned away from Marie," she said,

Sonnie

slyly. "But I came in the train last night, smile and miles, with my Uncle Rob—his name is Major Sanderson, and we must be velly quiet, 'cause he's velly poorly. I'm Miss Busybody. What's your name?"

"Soniland Baker—Sonnie, if you like."

He smiled at the child. She was about six years old, round and rosy and dimpled. He liked her soft, big eyes.

"I'll call you Sonnie; it's a booful name. I'll call my doll Sonnie, too. Did you come down in the snow with the other angels?"

"The angels don't come to Mittenplatz," he said.

"Yes, they does," she cried, eagerly. "It's a secret. Marie telled me, and she knows, because she's German, and speaks the language. There's angels in the snow; that's why it's so white. There's heaps and heaps of 'em. And when they shake their wings the snow is full of stars. Marie said you played angel-music, and I came to see. But God has forgotten your wings."

"I'm not an angel, you know," said Sonnie.

Her face fell. "I'm velly much disappointed," she began; then her lips flowered into a rose of a smile. "Well, maybe if you make angel-music, God will want to put you into the band in Heaven. There's a big German band there, Marie says. And all the angels stand round

The Valley of the Great Shadow

about the throne and play harps. I like angel-music. Play some more."

"Do you really like music, my music?" Sonnie asked.

"Yes, I does," she said, earnestly. "It makes me think of my dear, dear little kittie that died. She squealed like that when I pulled her tail."

"I have a kitten," said Sonnie, "but you mustn't hurt her."

Miss Busybody gave a glance at Fifine.

"I loves kittens," she said, soberly, "but I like music better." She climbed on a chair, and sat with legs dangling and arms folded, looking expectantly at him. Sonnie took up his violin again, and she sat mute till he had finished. Then she scrambled down from the chair, and made a quaint little curtsey.

"I'm velly much obliged, Sonnie; and when I say my prayers to Marie I'll ask God to put you in the band in Heaven."

She was half-way to the door, when she turned round, balanced herself on one leg and tilted her head, and looked at him, her eyes growing very big.

"Let's play cat and mouse," she said. "You're a mouse and I'm the grey kitten coming to dead you. And you must keep getting away, but in the end I'll catch you. Now then, run!"

The game was not over till Sonnie had been

Sonnie

duly caught and eaten. After the child was gone he threw himself on the sofa and laughed. The blood was swinging in his veins again, his pulses were beating. Miss Busybody had brought back life.

From that day Sonnie's loneliness ended. Miss Busybody had a passion for music, and while he played would sit mute, nursing Ffine, her big eyes fastened worshippingly on Sonnie's face. She had not lost her first impression of him; something of the angel still lingered about his rapt face and shining eyes.

When Ffine and he lay on the balcony in his *chaise longue*, she would bring her chair and sit beside him, and tell him quaint involved histories of her dolls, or repeat strange versions of the legends Marie told her. Sonnie had no time for sad thoughts.

Dr. Engel's next report was hopeful. In the fortnight the boy had done wonders; there was distinct, unexpected improvement in his condition.

Sonnie, studying the Doctor's face, saw the lines relax and the eyes brighten.

"So! That is good! Ah, yes; we shall make a man of you. One day you shall be maestro. Your violin will yet speak in all countries. But now, attention! You must take no cold, you must run no risk. A relapse now, and your chance goes."

The Valley of the Great Shadow

Sonnie did not speak. He had grown very pale; he breathed quickly. He turned away, and caught up Fifine and laid his face against her fur.

"Care and attention, my young friend, care and attention," said Engel, taking off his spectacles. The glasses were blurred, his own lips were unsteady. "No risk, no colds," he added, and hurried away.

The sun poured into the room, the skies laughed aloud. The gladness of the valley surged over the solemn pines. Sonnie wondered if the place had ever appeared to him chill and ghostly—a valley of dead men. Of dead men? It was the gate of life! This was the happy land where Death was vanquished.

"Oh, Life, here is thy victory! here is thy victory!" he sang. The words remained with him. They sang in his brain, they tingled in his fingers. He took up his violin, and the bow swept it triumphantly.

Triumph was in the music. It rang out clear and resonant among the notes that mounted up and up until they circled round the bared fang of the Ducanalp.

"Oh, Life, here is thy victory! O Life, here is thy victory!"

Major Sanderson, who had come to the Mit-tenthal too late, lifted his hand and feebly beat time to the music. The rhythm held the joy of

Sonnie

life exultant, unconquerable. He heard the quick march of hope, and his heart stepped to the measure. His face had been troubled, but it cleared as he listened. His lips moved. "Oh, Grave, where is thy victory?"

Sonnie went downstairs to the public balcony. The invalids were already in their *chaises longues*, a line of recumbents that made the balcony look like the section of a hospital ward. There were patches of colour to brighten the effect, a gaudy cushion, the Professor's tartan. Simplicity Baldwin's dress was a flare of scarlet in the foreground. There was colour in the sunburnt faces that turned smiling to welcome Sonnie. They seemed to him to wear a new expression; there was no cynicism in the mask of gaiety. The ring in the voices was not forced. Everybody was talking at once, suggesting expeditions, proposing skating, sleighing, tobogganing. The voices buzzed about the balcony like bees in the sun.

Miss Busybody wandered in and out of the hubbub, her red cloak challenging Simplicity's dress. She was not in spirits; her mouth drooped. When she saw Sonnie her face brightened. She ran to him. "Are you going for a walk? Please take me with you."

"Not to-day, sweetheart. I'm going in the post-wagon to Kleinbad."

"I want to go in the post-wagon, too. Please

The Valley of the Great Shadow

take me. I'm velly unhappy. My Uncle Rob is velly ill, and Marie can't go out, and there's nobody to play with me."

Sonnie thought a moment. They would have to walk back; but Miss Busybody was a good walker, and could easily manage the three miles, with the frequent rests that he would be obliged to take.

"Well, run and ask Marie if you can go."

She danced away, and came back radiant. She skipped beside Sonnie on their way to meet the post-sleigh. They were both in spirits to match the sun. They took their seats, and the post jangled along the road and across the bridge, under which the moan of the Grünwasser was muffled. The valley opened out white, glittering where the rays danced. The surface of the snow was broken into an ice forest of tiny fronds and flowering crystals. In the distance the Ducanalp gleamed against the blue background.

Sonnie saw it all with his eager eyes. His face was sharp with the keenness of his gaze. He was looking beyond the valley, beyond the white gates of the pass, to the years before him. He would be maestro; he was going to realise his dream of fame.

"Oh, Life, here is thy victory!"

He felt young again; the weight of the years had lifted. Suddenly he broke into the words of a poem Philippa Joy was fond of repeating:

Sonnie

"Is it so small a thing
To have enjoyed the sun?
To have lived light in the spring,
To have loved, to have thought, to have done?"

"What's that?" asked Miss Busybody.

"That's the song of a man who grasps fame."

"What's fame?"

"Fame?—oh, fame—I really don't know how to tell you. Fame is when they give you a laurel wreath, and everybody says you are a genius."

"That's nothing. I heard Simplicity say it this morning when you were playing. 'Sonnie is a genius,' she said; 'it's drefful to think he can't live.' And Philippa said, 'He can't die. People who play like that can't die.' "

There were tattered lights in the sky. The clouds were stealthily mustering. Their shadow crossed Sonnie's face.

"They talked lots about you," Miss Busybody went on, "but I've forgotten. And then Miss Blake cried, and said, 'Sonnie can't die; he shows us how to live.' And the Professor conkerdicted her, and said, 'He can't live; he shows us how to die.' And I asked them what it meant, and they told me to run away. Is that being a genius, Sonnie? Is that fame?"

Sonnie drew a deep breath. "Perhaps; only that kind has no laurels."

"You shall have laurels, Sonnie. I'll ask my Uncle Rob to buy you one. I know what laurels

The Valley of the Great Shadow

is; it's a wreath on a coffin. It was on my daddy's, because he was a brave soldier. He was just awfully brave. He stood up in the stirrups and waved his sword to the regiment, and called out, 'Death and victory!' and then he was shot. My Uncle Rob makes me stand on the table and shout it. He shouts, too, 'Death and victory!' Marie says it's wunderschön."

The clouds drifted away from Sonnie's face. By the time they reached Kleinbad the shadow had passed.

They lunched at the Kurhaus, and afterwards set out to walk back to Mittenplatz. The child chattered along the road, but Sonnie was feeling tired. They rested a while before they struck into the pine wood. He shivered as he entered the shadow.

"Night has come awful quick," said Miss Busybody presently.

Sonnie peered through the tree-trunks. It was always dusk in the wood, but the clouds must have gathered to make the shadows so dense. All at once Miss Busybody exclaimed, "Look! look! the angels are shaking their wings."

It had begun to snow. Sonnie thought anxiously of the long walk before them; they had only gone half the distance. It was as easy to go on as to return to Kleinbad, and a sleigh might overtake them. He hurried the pace, his

Sonnie

breathing quickening. Miss Busybody trotted beside him, talking gaily of the angels passing. They came from the shelter of the pines into a whirling tumult of snowflakes. They could see nothing; mountain and valley were hidden in the folds of the storm.

"I wish I had my fur—it's drefful cold," said the child. Her face was blue, her teeth chattered.

Sonnie looked uneasily at her. They were nearly two miles from home, and there was the valley to be crossed. He was cold, too, and tired, but they must push on.

"Courage, sweetheart," he said, cheerfully; "we shall soon be at home."

He exerted himself to tell her stories, but they did not amuse her. Every moment she interrupted him with complaints of the cold. Presently she began to cough. What was to be done? He could only help her by giving her his jacket, and he himself was chilly enough already. But she was taking cold, and he had heard of children dying of croup.

He hurried her along the road, their feet clogged by the deepening snow.

Miss Busybody began to cry. Sonnie stopped.

"What is it, sweetheart?"

"I'm just deaded with cold," she sobbed, "and my foots is asleep. Can't I get under your overcoat?"

The Valley of the Great Shadow

The boy hesitated. Engel's voice was in his ears: "No risk. No cold. A relapse now, and you chance goes."

Miss Busybody's sobs punctuated the sentences. Sonnie set his mouth hard, drew off his overcoat, and slipped out of his jacket.

"Here, sweetheart," he said; "put on my jacket under your cloak, and you'll soon be warm." He put on his overcoat again, and buttoned the jacket round her.

"Now then, Miss Busybody, hurry!" he said, cheerily.

"Death and victory!" he cried, and they plunged forward. How it snowed! The heavens had fallen to earth, and the shattered skies were full of tiny stars. They sprinkled his coat and clung to his feet as he walked. He could not keep up the pace. His breath quickened; he gasped at every stab of the cold.

The shroud of the snow wound itself round and round in thicker folds. His feet grew more and more heavy. Miss Busybody's weight on his arm was dragging him down. He could not talk to her; he needed to be careful of those quick breaths.

"I can't truly walk no further, Sonnie; please carry me."

"I can't, poor little sweetheart. You're too heavy."

She looked reproachfully at him.

Sonnie

"My daddy used to carry me. I'm truly, truly tired, Sonnie."

"I know, dear, I know. Perhaps a sleigh will come. Be brave a little longer."

They went on a few yards; then the child's pent-up misery burst in a howl.

"It's no use. My foot is dead. I can't walk, Sonnie, I can't!" She sat down in the snow, and sobbed there.

The boy looked at her, then at the road up and down. He could only see a few feet ahead. He shouted. The spent voice lost itself in the silence of the snow. The storm swept round them the folds of the shroud thicker and thicker. There was no light from chalet or shed. He strained his ears for the sound of bells. The hush of the grave held the valley.

They could not stay there to perish in the snow. He could not leave the child. To carry her was to court death. It was hard enough for him to struggle on alone.

"A relapse now, and your chance goes."

"I wish my daddy was here," Miss Busybody sobbed.

The boy's face changed. Her daddy was dead. His last cry, "Death and victory!" still rang in his ears.

He stooped and lifted Miss Busybody.

"Hurrah! Death — and victory!" he panted as he stumbled forward.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

Her arms round his neck made breathing still more difficult. Her red cloak falling round him hindered his feet. Gasping, fighting, blinded, breathless, he staggered on.

The snow was lightening round them. Where the sleigh-lamps pierced it, it was like an open gate. Sonnie did not see the light—his head was bent forward; his strained eyes saw only the red of the child's cloak. The beating of his heart battered in his ears.

The lights came nearer. The bells were muffled by the snow. The horse stepped carefully, shaking the red plume on his forehead. There was no sound of hoofs.

The sleigh was almost upon them before Sonnie was aware of it. The crack of Jakob Meyer's whip startled him like the crack of doom. He set down the child, and stood gasping, unable to answer Dr. Engel's questions. The Doctor's sharp voice did not frighten Miss Busybody. She knew quite well who Engel was.

"Sonnie carried me," she said. "I was almost deaded, and he carried me, and so he's out of breath. I expect he's velly cold, too; he gave me his jacket 'cause I was cold."

Engel started as she spoke, and gave the child a keen look, but turned to Sonnie.

"I'll drive you home," he said, in a queer, dry voice. "Come." He helped the boy into the sleigh, and wrapped him in his bear-skin.

Sonnie

"So! Lie back. Don't speak. I'll look after the little one."

He took Miss Busybody on his knee, gave a quick order to Jakob Meyer.

"Ja wohl," said Jakob, turning the horse towards Mittenplatz. The frown settled between Engel's brows. Had the boy done himself irreparable mischief? Who was the child? The peculiar ringing intonation of her voice had struck familiarly on his ears. Except for the English accent it might have been Isolde speaking. His arm tightened round the child.

"What is your name, little one?"

"Miss Busybody."

"No, no. What does mother call you?"

"My muvver is deaded."

"What, then, does father call you?"

"My daddy's deaded, too. He was a brave soldier. I'm Uncle Rob's girl."

"And what does Uncle Rob call you?"

"Little demon."

"So! Then, poor little one, thou hast no name but Miss Busybody."

"Ah, but I have!" she said, eagerly. "It's a booful name, and it was my muvver's. It's velly long to say. Shall I say it?" She looked up confidingly at him, her soft eyes smiling.

"Yes."

"Isolde Johanna Stannard."

CHAPTER IV

BABETTE

Babette was shivering in her little room on the landing. Outside the sun lay white on the white snow. Where the pines climbed the hills there was a splash of yellow on the trunks and a tangle of saffron light among the branches. The shadows were deep on the mountain-side, and the December cold was so intense you could almost see it, an impalpable blue hanging over the snow.

Even in the Hotel Royal it was cold, and Babette's teeth chattered while she cut the slips of pinewood with which she made the bedroom fires. She cut the wood so that the curled shavings came at marked intervals and made a little white tree, like the ghost of the pines that her father felled in the forest. She liked to see the tree grow under her fingers, and to watch it aflame afterwards in the stove, all its branches blazing. It was a prettier death, she thought, than came to the blocks of wood that slowly smoked themselves out.

Now and then a fit of coughing seized her, and when it was over she would lift her eyes to

Babette

the bell indicator, afraid lest she had not heard the bell of No. 10.

In No. 10 Sonnie Baker lay ill from the chill caught in the snowstorm. Babette had made several errands to his room already, to see if he wanted anything. She was coughing now because she had spent the previous night on the floor outside his door. He had sent his nurse away for a night's rest, and Babette could not bear to leave him alone when any moment he might need help and not have strength to ring. So she had spent the night at his door, listening to every movement inside, and to-day she was coughing more than ever. She was tired and cold, but she did not think of that as she sat in her fireless closet ready to answer the bells.

There came the shrill peal—the fiftieth time that morning. She laid down the wood and got up, setting her cap straight as she passed the looking-glass. Who could tell? Perhaps she would meet Karl, the porter, on the stairs.

Her eyes brightened; she gave a second look at herself. She shivered again as she saw her face; it was livid where the red patches did not burn. Her eyes were sunken. She could not bear to look. She went out quickly, hoping that Karl would not meet her. She was thankful that her father could not see her. Poor old man, he was so delighted that his girl was in the Mitten-thal, where sickness was cured and where weak

The Valley of the Great Shadow

lungs grew strong. He did not know that health only came back to those who had leisure and comfort and ease. Babette had to work day and night, waiting on invalids, some of whom were not as ill as herself.

She was so bright always that only Sonnie Baker had noticed her quick breathing and her tired face. Even Karl did not suspect that anything was wrong, for she laughed through the half-hour that Frau Bullen occasionally gave the lovers.

Her face was one of the brightest in the hotel, though her feet were constantly weary in running errands, sometimes for those who only came to the Mittenenthal for amusement. She thought it such a beautiful thing to be strong that it delighted her to wait on people who were not sick like herself. She looked on ungrudgingly at those who walked with Life, and her hand did not struggle in the chill grasp that held it. She knew she was getting worse, that the hard life was becoming too hard for her, but she never told any one. She had accepted her fate. She was too poor to afford the luxury of life. It was one among the things she must do without. It had been something that she had been able to come to Mittenplatz, to give herself the benefit of the wonderful climate, and to spend a whole winter in the same hotel with Karl.

She loved the valley, with its still air, its sun,

Babette

its snow. It was a beautiful place, where people were cured. Sometimes Babette felt as if the stillness was caused by great white wings spread over the valley, and she would dream of a great angel poised in the air. She never saw the shadow of the wings. To her the angel who hovered over the valley was always the Angel of Life. It was the smiling Angel of Death who walked in the valley. And she loved the people who lay on the balconies with bright faces, waiting; and their friends who waited on them with bright faces, though their hearts were wrung. She was only a simple peasant, but she understood the pathos and the tragedy round her. She could not have put it into words, but she felt the atmosphere charged with great emotions, and she had seen the terrible beauty of Life and the exquisite beauty of Death. She loved the angel with the gentle touch and the silent feet and the smiling face. His footfall was as silent as that of the snow; and the peace and cold of the snow were his, also. The day was his, and the night, and his hand rested lightly on the children of men. Babette had seen his face many times that winter. She was glad that she had come to the valley where men learned to see Death and not to fear him.

She climbed the stairs to answer the bell. It was the Fräulein Joy who had rung, and she was one of those who considered Babette, and never

The Valley of the Great Shadow

rung unnecessarily. To-day Philippa had made a cup of beef-tea for Babette. She had noticed that the girl was looking pale, and she knew that Babette had more to do now that Sonnie Baker was confined to bed.

"Sit down, Babette, and drink this; then I will ask you to take that parcel to No. 10."

There were a good many parcels on the table. Babette remembered that it was the day before Christmas. Philippa had a small bronze figure in her hand. She was looking at it hesitatingly. Then she saw that Babette was gazing at the bronze.

"Do you want to see it, Babette?" she asked, rousing herself from her thoughts. "See, it is a beautiful St. John, by a great artist."

Babette looked at it with a curiously eager face.

"It's wunderschön," she said. "But it is not very like—does the Fräulein know that in Mit-ten-platz the Herr Doctor is called 'der Heilige Johann'?"

"Dr. Engel? No; I didn't know." Philippa's voice was interested. "Why is he called so?"

"It is his good heart, and the life so holy. He lives but to do good, and the poor worship him."

"He always seems so—silent." Philippa hesitated for the word.

"But his heart speaks." Babette smiled.

Babette

Philippa turned her face a little aside. Her eyes were not so frank as usual.

"It is a present for the Doctor," she said in an embarrassed manner. "He has been so kind, and it is Noël—and his name is John. In England we give our friends presents at Christmas," she added, with unnecessary emphasis.

"But yes; and here also," said Babette, smiling. She would not have thought it unnatural if the Fräulein Joy had wished to give fifty presents to Dr. Engel. "And shall I ask of Karl to take the Fräulein's gift to the Herr Doctor?"

"No, no," said Philippa, hastily. "You are always ready to call Karl, I notice, Babette. And I don't care to tell everybody to whom I am sending presents. I tell you, because you like the Doctor, and you know how good he has been."

"He has saved the Fräulein's life," said Babette. "And now he will have the marvelous joy of the Fräulein's gift."

Philippa coloured, and put the bronze figure on the table. "He may not care for it," she said, with great unconcern. "Have you finished your beef-tea, Babette? You must come again to-morrow for another cup. You are looking very ill; you should rest."

Babette smiled as she shook her head.

"When you are rich, you rest; when you are poor, you work."

The Valley of the Great Shadow

"That seems to be the rule," Philippa said, sadly; "and it is so hard. I suppose you are very poor, Babette?"

Babette flushed all over her white face.

"Ach no!" she laughed, joyfully. "I have the little father, and I have Karl."

Philippa's face changed, and her voice changed, too. "You are richer than I am, Babette."

Her thin, white hand pressed the table till the knuckles reddened. "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me," she was thinking.

Babette looked at her pale face, paler for the black frock, and her eyes filled with ready sympathy.

"Poor little one!" she whispered. She tried to say more, but the words would not come. She shook her head, and escaped from the room.

Philippa sat down and laid her cheek against the bronze on the table. She was not crying; all her tears had been buried in the grave in the *friedhof*, but the look in her eyes was sadder than tears.

"Lover and friend, lover and friend," she whispered over and over again. And yet he had been good to her—so good to her. What had she said or done that his manner should have changed so? He was brusque and harsh now; his kindness touched her through a glove of steel. But though he was cool and stern, he

Babette

was the one person she trusted—and since her father's death, the one person on whom she could lean. "The good Doctor." "His heart speaks." What did it matter if he was no longer her friend? She would never forget that time when his friendship had been the only thing that bound her to life. She had thought then that his tenderness had meant more than friendship, more even than pity. But lately, since she had grown stronger, his attitude had been different. His visits had been coldly professional. He no longer came into the room smiling, his pockets bulging with the books he had brought to amuse her. He no longer stayed, talking about the books, when his medical visit was over. Of course his time was largely given to Sonnie Baker, who had been ill ever since his walk from Kleinbad. But that scarcely accounted for his changed manner. "If he were like other men, I would say he was fickle," Philippa thought. "But he is not like other men. His heart speaks, and the poor worship him. And they call him St. John in the valley." She smiled, a tender pride in the smile. "He is a saint—his lonely, unselfish life is finer than the life any saint ever lived. And he stays here in the wilderness—"

She broke off her thoughts to pack the St. John into its case. Then she put it among the other presents. She would not send it by Karl, but give it herself to Dr. Engel when he came

The Valley of the Great Shadow

to see her that day. She had taken cold, and he had ordered her to stay in her rooms for the present.

Philippa was glad to escape the preparations for Christmas. She had no heart for the festivities downstairs.

The hotel was full of visitors, come for the skating, or to spend Christmas with their friends who were ill. Their voices banished the silence in the corridors, their laughing drove away the ghosts. The piano banging all day to the spin of galops and waltzes was a gayer sound than Sonnie's violin. The rush up and down the stairs silenced the creak of the lift. You missed the patient, smiling faces of the winter in the tide of light-faced, light-footed people who surged over the halls and passages. There was nothing of the health-resort left in the hotel. Christmas had taken possession.

Frau Bullen was in the pantry recklessly ordering dainties for dinner and for the supper afterwards. Beef-tea and milk-pudding had had their day; they ceased to be—for the present. The balcony was empty of its *chaises longues*. The invalids were in the salon, making garlands for the walls, trimming the Christmas fir. The tree was almost dressed. Miss Busybody stood fascinated by its glitter of tinsel, its globes of coloured glass and candles. On the topmost bough stood a plaster figure of the Christ-child.

Babette

There were some smaller trees standing near. These were for the invalids who had to stay in their rooms. Miss Busybody had already hung her presents for Sonnie and Fifine on the one that was going to No. 10. She did not think it was such a pretty tree as the one Frau Bullen was sending to Philippa. Babette stood beside the child admiring the trees. She knew that when night came Frau Bullen would bid her carry them to the different rooms, with her "Gruss" and "Glückwünsch." That would please Babette very much; but she wished there had been a Christ-child on the Fräulein's tree. She could not forget the black-robed figure and the face of Philippa that morning. It made her heart heavy, it weighted her feet more than the weariness that grew harder to resist as the day went on. Up and down, up and down the interminable steps Babette went, on the errands of the people who were too busy with their amusements to spare the servants; and her face grew greyer and her breathing more painful with every errand. Sometimes she stopped, gasping, on the landing, and then hurried on to avoid the eyes of the merry people passing up in the lift. But she did not pity herself; all her pity was for Philippa.

The sun went down, and the cold stabbed keen and fierce over the valley; but she did not feel it. She had forgotten the weary stairs, the

The Valley of the Great Shadow

pain in her side. She could only remember the face of the girl who had lost her father.

"If there had been the Christ-child on the tree, it would surely have brought comfort," she thought. And the more she thought of it the more certain she was that the Christ-child would have brought comfort to the little Fräulein. Ach, if she could but afford to buy a Christ-child for the Fräulein. At last she took her purse, and counted up the money put by week by week for her father.

"I will spare two francs," she said. "The Fräulein is poorer than me. The Christ-child will comfort the broken heart."

She could not go to the shops herself, but Karl would buy the Christ-child for her when he went to the post. Her cheeks burned, her eyes glowed, as she waited for Karl to come back. Every now and then she went to the window and looked down the road for him.

There he was at last, the slow one! And he carried a little parcel carefully. Babette clasped her hands: "Ach, du herrliches Christ-kind!" She waited on the landing for Karl, and he came running up.

"Ach, liebchen, there is no a Christ-child more in the shops. But I have bought thee an equally beautiful image. The Fräulein will be greatly comforted when thou givest him."

Babette

Babette's face fell. "Thou hast not brought the Christ-child?"

"Nein, nein; but one as beautiful. Only look, liebchen!"

He unrolled the paper, and with a flourish displayed a bust of Bismarck.

"Thou dost not like it?" he exclaimed, staring at Babette. "But it is wunderschön. The Fräulein will marvel at it."

"I marvel at thee!" Babette said, half crying with disappointment. "Oh, thou great dummkopf! The Christ-child—and thou bringest Bismarck!"

"They had only angels," said Karl, crest-fallen.

"Then must thou bring an angel," said Babette, severely. "What comfort is there in Bismarck?"

Karl could not go out again till after dinner, and he was only just in time with the angel. Babette had already toiled up the stairs several times, carrying trees to different rooms. The pots were heavy. She could scarcely breathe for the pain in her side. If she could only go up in the lift. But the lift was for the visitors, not for the servants who carried burdens.

She left Philippa's tree till the last. Then she went up with it to the top landing, where Karl was waiting, looking sheepishly at the little plaster angel he had bought.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

"Oh, thou good Karl! Ach! but it is wunderschön," Babette gasped. She kissed him suddenly. "Thou art not a dummkopf."

Karl looked gratified. "I have then chosen well. Hast thou praise for me?"

Babette turned her bright face to him. He thought she panted from the weight of the tree. They fastened the angel to the topmost bough and lighted the candles together, their hands touching many times, and then Karl carried it to the door of Philippa's room. Here Babette took it, and bore it, all glory and glitter, into the room where Philippa sat alone in the firelight, waiting for Dr. Engel's visit. She started up, exclaiming; and Babette stood breathless and smiling till a bell called her from the sight of Philippa's pleasure. She had to run downstairs and up again, and this time the pain was like a sword in her side.

Dr. Engel, going up to Philippa, saw Babette clinging to the balustrade. He was only just in time to catch her as she fell.

Left alone, Philippa gazed sorrowfully at the tree. The room was gaudy with colour and light, but there could be no *fest* for her. Outside the snow lay heaped, grey in the sunless night, and greyer and colder still it lay heaped on her father's grave in the *friedhof*.

One by one the candles on the Christmas fir ,

Babette

burnt low and burnt out, and the world outside came into the room, cold and grey and sad. The tree without its lights seemed to be dead, but on the topmost bough there was a glimmer where the blaze of the logs touched the angel. In the glare of the candles she had not noticed it, but now she saw it, and the pain in her eyes deepened.

"I suppose it is meant for the Angel of Life," she said. "How ironical it is to send it to me when I have nothing to live for."

Just then the bells crashed out from the church, and she smiled a dreary smile. "That is ironical, too—to ring out peace and good will to so many poor souls to whom peace only means death. And what good will does Christmas bring to Babette, for instance? Only extra work, until she is ready to drop in carrying other people's presents. No one gives her anything—not even an angel with an ironical message of life. And she has something to live for—her father and Karl. Poor Babette, who is too poor to rest!"

Philippa's thoughts moved from her own misery to Babette's hard lot. It was terrible that she should have to work because she was too poor to rest. "She is much more ill than I am," she said to herself; "but no one gives her a chance to get well." Suddenly she started up. Babette should have a chance. She should

The Valley of the Great Shadow

have every chance that money and care could give her.

Philippa walked up and down the room in a fever of enthusiasm, developing her scheme. She was rich; she could afford anything that was needed to make Babette well. The bells pealed out with a triumphant note, "Peace and good will to Babette!"

Philippa lifted her arms to the angel on the bough and laughed aloud. "Ah, little angel, you have brought a message of life to Babette."

She stood in the middle of the floor in a white wrapper, the long sleeves fallen back from her arms giving a suggestion of wings. The light was dim round her, and the Doctor, arrested in the doorway, peered short-sightedly into the dusk. She might have been a spirit.

A tender, pleased look came into his eyes and softened them. He stood gazing at the girl. Then her arms dropped, and he saw only the woman against whom he had steeled his heart.

"They are all heartless," he thought. "Here she dances gaily while Babette dies at her door."

He gave another louder knock and went forward. "May I come in?" Philippa sprang to meet him. She caught his hand and drew him forward. In the firelight he saw her face radiant. He lifted his brows at the warmth of his welcome, but his mood melted in spite of him-

Babette

self. With an embarrassed surprise he allowed her to lead him into the room. She was always surprising him, always appearing in a new, unexpected character. But he had just left Babette, and he hardened his heart again.

"I will not stop," he said. "You are better, and I am busy."

"I am perfectly well," she said, impatiently. "But I want to speak to you. It is very important. Something must be done at once for Babette, and you must advise me."

Philippa had forgotten Engel's coldness. Her manner was as unconstrained as it had been before her father's death. Engel sat down, crushing his soft hat in his hands with the same nervous force with which he was trying to crush the tenderness he felt for her. He kept his eyes downcast while she explained her scheme for Babette. Though he was iron to her unconscious appeals, he was triumphant because she had proved herself less callous and self-engrossed than the majority of the women whom he attended.

"You see what I mean," Philippa said, eagerly. "To the people in the hotel she will be my private maid. In reality she shall be my guest. She shall have the room next mine; I will give her every comfort, and I will nurse her myself."

Engel got up slowly and wearily from his chair.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

"I wish you had thought of this before. It is too late now; Babette is dying."

The life failed from Philippa's face.

"Dying?" she cried, in a hushed voice. "Babette? Surely not! She was here an hour ago. Dying?"

"I fear so," he said, sadly. "She has broken a blood-vessel. Now I will go. I must move her to another room."

Philippa sprang towards him.

"Bring her to mine. You must—for to-night at least. Oh, I am so grieved! Bring her at once."

Engel walked directly to the closet on the landing where one of the maids was tending Babette.

He carried her into Philippa's room and laid her on the bed. Then he turned to Philippa, who stood with sorrowful eyes on the girl.

"I must stay with her for an hour or two. You will sit in that chair; I will call you if I want anything."

Philippa could not speak. She was struggling with the faintness that threatened to overcome her. She walked to the bed and helped Rosa to unloose Babette's clothes and to make her ready for the night. Then, without a word to Engel, she went to the chair and lay back in the shadow. She did not want him to see that she was faint, and she did not want him to send her from the room.

Babette

After a time the faintness passed. She lay listening to Engel's voice speaking very kindly to Babette. How gentle he was! Had she ever thought this man hard? And yet, and yet he was hard to her. Well, it could not be his fault; she must have given some reason for his changed conduct. No friend could have been more to her than he had been at first. The murmur of his voice mixed drowsily with her thoughts, and grew fainter and fainter. She thought she heard chimes.

She woke shivering. The room was very cold and dark, except where the night-light made a circle of radiance. There was no fire; a slip of white showed the snow against the open window. Philippa stared vaguely. Where was she? She put up her hands and felt the heavy coat tucked round her. Whose coat was it?

She sat up straight and peered into the darkness. A sound of soft breathing came from the bed. The light cast a gigantic halo on the wall, and in the midst of it was the shadow of a head. Engel quietly crossed to Philippa's side.

"Don't move," he whispered. "She sleeps."

"What time is it?" Philippa asked.

"Nearly six."

The girl sat up, rubbing her eyes. "Have I been asleep all night? and kept you here?"

"Babette kept me," he answered.

Philippa looked remorsefully at him. "How

The Valley of the Great Shadow

could I have slept so long? Oh, why didn't you wake me? And this is your coat? Oh, you shouldn't have done it! You gave it to me, and you have been sitting without an overcoat all night! No fire, and the window open! I can never forgive myself!"

"Babette needed the cold air," he said. "It is nothing. I am yet warm."

"Let me feel your hands." She took his hands in hers. They were like ice. "Oh, I shall never forgive myself!" she cried, passionately. She felt the sudden rigidity that tightened his muscles, and she got up and went into her sitting-room. Here the electric light was turned on. There was a fire, and a kettle singing on the stove. Philippa made tea, and heaped the fire with logs. Then she called Engel from the bedroom. He came to her, a new shyness under his gravity, and drank the tea, talking all the time of Babette. There was no consciousness in Philippa's eyes. They met his frankly. She had many questions to ask about Babette. It was he who was embarrassed. And yet he lingered beside the fire, warming himself, his heart melting towards the girl whose remorseful tenderness could not do enough for him. It was pleasant to sit there with her, to listen to her. His hands burnt still where her hands had touched them.

"I must go." His height overtopped her

Babette

small figure. His eyes bent down very pleasantly on her. "I begin my rounds soon after six."

"Yes, I know," she said, eagerly. "And though it is Christmas Day, you take no holiday. Ah! I remember! But you are to have a Christmas gift—"

"I—I, too, would ask for a Christmas gift," he stammered. What was he going to say? He hardly knew. He felt her touch on his hand. He knew he loved her. He had sat all night gazing at her, thinking.

"Wait! wait!" Philippa laughed joyfully. "It is here, all ready for you. I think you will like it."

She ran to the table and gave him the case with the bronze, and stood by while he opened it. Her eyes were shining, her face was eager; she had felt Engel's altered manner, and her heart had leaped to meet it.

He paused in opening the case, and gave her a look, shy and full of meaning. "But I want—two gifts," he smiled.

Philippa's lips puckered up into protest. "Two?" she cried, gaily. Engel did not answer. He had unrolled the bronze, and was gazing at it with changed face.

"Don't you like it?" Philippa said. "I sent for it from Florence for you. It is Donatello's 'St. John.' "

The Valley of the Great Shadow

"Yes, I know. You are very kind." His voice was constrained; his face was again reserved. All the meaning had passed from his manner, all the happiness from his eyes. The bronze had raked up the past again. It was a replica of one he had bought for Isolde in Florence ten years ago.

Philippa stood transfixed where he had left her. Her face had changed, too. What could there have been in a simple Christmas present to vex him so? she wondered, miserably.

Karl sprang up from his place on the landing where he had crouched all night, in sight of the room where Babette lay. The light on the landing was still burning.

"Is she then dead—the little one?"

"She is dead to me," said Engel.

Karl fell back. "Babette!" he cried.

The pain in his voice pierced through Engel's thoughts. He caught the poor fellow by the hand.

"Nein! nein! She lives—Babette. The danger passes. She will recover."

"Gott sei dank!" Karl gasped. "And you—ach lieber, Herr Doktor, and the good Fräulein Joy, who has been so kind—"

Engel walked on. At the end of the passage a door opened and Miss Busybody, in her little dressing-gown, appeared. At the sight of the

Babette

Doctor she ran and put her arms round his legs. "I'm looking for the Christ-kind," she whispered, loudly. "Marie says he is walking round to-night. Have you seed him?"

Engel lifted the child and kissed her. He kept her in his arms a long time. Miss Busybody struggled down at last.

"Let me feel in your pockets if you've got somefing for me." The Doctor opened his overcoat, and the child fumbled in an inner pocket. At last she found the doll he had brought for her the night before. Her face broke into wonderful smiles. She looked up beaming.

"I love you velly much," she said, earnestly. "You're nearly as nice as Philippa; and my Uncle Rob says she is the Joy of the Mitten-thal."

CHAPTER V

MERRIDEW

"Merridew is a fool," growled the Professor. "Why can't he be content with his own natural folly?"

"We never know when we are well off," said Simplicity.

The Professor looked impatiently to the other end of the table, where Merridew's was the only grave face. Everybody was laughing. The people at the Professor's end of the table, who could not tell what it was all about, shrugged their shoulders.

"It is only Mr. Merridew again," Philippa said to Miss Blake.

"The man is a fool," the Professor repeated, and went on with his soup.

"I know what a fool is, Professor," Miss Busybody said. Major Sanderson glanced at the child, then smiled across at Philippa. He was very proud of his niece.

"Tell us what a fool is, you little pitcher!" he said.

Miss Busybody tilted her head and looked shy.

"A fool is a person that makes you laugh,

Merridew

Uncle Rob. I know. I saw him once at the circus. He had on a cap with bells, and his face was red and white. Is Mr. Merridew a fool because he has got red spots on his face?"

"No, no. Go on with your lunch, you little demon," said Major Sanderson, hastily. "Poor Mr. Merridew is an invalid."

"I don't think there is much wrong with him," said Miss Blake, in her depressed voice. "He is a little hipped—"

"Hipped!" thundered the Professor. "Where are your eyes, ma'am? Can any person with sense look at that man and not see he is as good as dead?" He glared at Miss Blake, the pale little woman beside him. She had prominent china-blue eyes, and looked like a Dutch doll. Miss Blake, who was evidently anxious and worried, flushed and dropped her face over her plate. Every one in the hotel knew that she and the Professor were no longer friends, and that Miss Blake was miserable and the Professor surly. But no one knew what had happened between them. Philippa heard Miss Blake's fork clatter against the plate, and she braved the Professor's temper.

"I think Miss Blake is quite right," she said, quietly. "Mr. Merridew doesn't look like an invalid. How bright he is! The hotel would be dull enough without him."

"Frau Bullen pays him to keep up our spirits,"

The Valley of the Great Shadow

grunted the Professor. "He is a professional clown."

"You are abominable, Professor," said Philippa, hotly. "Please attack some one else—"

"I'll attack Engel, if you like," he growled. "Engel is a fossil; he is hard enough to belong to the stone age. He—"

Philippa laughed while she reddened. "At any rate, Mr. Merridew is the kindest man here," she said, quickly.

"I wonder if any one is going to toboggan to-night?" Miss Blake put in, hurriedly. "It is full moon. I would like to go out."

"I should think you would like some tobogganing, Professor. You said it improved your temper," Philippa said, mischievously.

"Ask Merridew," growled the Professor. "I'm busy."

"Don't trouble," said Miss Blake, hastily; "I don't want to—I—"

Philippa turned to Merridew, who was passing her chair on his way from the *salle-à-manger*. His coat hung loose from his shoulders, his figure was stooping and thin. His face was thin, too, and the colour on his cheeks made his eyes glitter.

"Mr. Merridew, won't you toboggan with Miss Blake to-night?" She caught the demur on his face, and added, "It is so dull for her to sit reading to the Professor every night."

Merridew

Miss Blake flushed again, and her eyes filled. She did not tell Philippa what everybody knew, that for the last two evenings the Professor and she had not read together. Merridew understood what Philippa meant, and answered pleasantly, in his grave tones:

"I should be delighted. It is just the weather for tobogganing. After dinner, then, Miss Blake."

"Mr. Merridew," Miss Busybody piped, "the Professor says you are a fool."

"Only a fool?" Merridew smiled.

"Come here, Miss Busybody. You have not told me what you are going to call your new doll," said Philippa.

The child ran round the table and climbed on to Philippa's knee. "My new doll, that Dr. Engel gave me for Christmas? Her name is Philippa. Philippa and something else, only it's too hard to 'member. But he wrote it down, and I've got the paper."

"Who wrote it down? What paper?" Philippa asked, bending till her brown hair mixed with the child's fair locks.

"Dr. Engel. This is the paper. It was in my dollie's sash when I took her out of his pocket."

Miss Busybody carefully untied her handkerchief and produced a scrap of paper. "I keep it safe, 'cos I can't 'member the name, and Marie can't," she explained.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

Philippa took the paper and read the two words on it, "Philippa Alcestis." She recognized Engel's writing, and stared. What did it mean? Who was Philippa Alcestis?

"I don't understand," she said, a little frown showing between her eyes. "Who was Alcestis, Professor?"

"Alkestis, you mean," said the Professor. "She was the woman whom Hercules brought back from the dead."

"No, she wasn't," said Miss Busybody, eagerly. "She was Philippa, I know, 'cos I asked Dr. —"

Philippa caught up the child and ran laughing out of the room with her. Miss Blake turned to Merridew, a spark of interest in her melancholy eyes.

"I wonder—" she sighed.

He shook his head. "I don't think so. Engel has never been known to give a thought to any woman."

"Of course he has not," said the Professor. "He knows 'em too well. If a woman is not a fool, she is a liar; and if she is neither, she's a confounded nuisance."

He pushed his chair noisily, and they heard him growling to himself as he left the table.

Miss Blake looked as if she would cry. Merridew gave her a kind glance. "No one minds

Merridew

the Professor's storms," he said; "we are all used to them."

"He is—a charming man," faltered Miss Blake, "only occasionally—a little blunt."

"Quite so," Merridew agreed.

He walked out on to the balcony, and a pleased look was in his eyes as they rested on the scene. Long use had made it familiar, but to him it was always new. Mittenplatz in mist, Mittenplatz in sun, Mittenplatz at dawn, and Mittenplatz in the red evening were so many different places. Sometimes the houses were transfigured, their plain faces lighted up; and when their eyes shone through the mystery of the moonlight they had charm for a lover's eye.

Merridew was one of the lovers. The fascination of the place held him. He had come under the spell of its silence and its sun, and if it had been possible to him to leave the valley, he would not have chosen to go. He listened to the comments of newcomers with amusement in his grave eyes. He knew that in a month or two the spell would be woven round them, too, and that haunting mystery of the mountains would hold them as it held him.

He was one of those who troop into the valley, and after a time troop out again by one of its two passes. Some go out by the high pass of the White Gate, and some the train bears down again into the cities. Merridew knew that his

The Valley of the Great Shadow

way out would be by the high pass. When he had first come to the Mittenthal, hopelessness and loneliness had eaten his heart out. The number of invalids had melted with the melting of the snow, but he had been among those who could not go South.

The snow never altogether disappears from the Mittenthal. Even after it melts in the valley, through all the summer's heat you can see the wreaths lying on the higher peaks.

The other invalid in the Hotel Royal was a woman. They called her The Child in the hotel, because she was so little and eager, and so absurdly young for her years. She must have been forty, and she was very poor and quite alone. But she was always gay, and her kind brown eyes always had a laugh in them. Through the summer the man lying helpless, and The Child almost as helpless, found their world in each other. She was ten years older than he, but her eyes were ten years younger than his; and Meridew had never thought about her age at all.

He grew gay and contented within sound of her laugh, and in sight of her eyes. Their chairs were always together on the balcony, and they read Browning, and played chess, and made bets on the weather, and laughed in the sun.

Sometimes they went into the fields where the Grünwasser flowed, to gather the flowers, the purple bells and heart's-ease that flaunted in

Merridew

the valley. They would come back exhausted, and for days after would pretend to each other that the balcony was too desirable a place to leave for the fields, with their orchestras of crickets twanging away in the grass.

She called these months her holiday. "When the winter comes there is too much to do for it to be possible to be idle," she told him.

"In this place? Too much to do?" He lifted his brows. "Oh, yes; there are so many to be nursed, so many lonely ones to comfort. It takes me all my time to lift even a corner of the weight of life from these poor souls. But it is worth doing," she added, cheerily.

His heart was in the look he gave her. "You have lifted all the corners of my weight of life, Child."

"Have I?" she said, gaily. "That is good. I am glad. You will be able to do it for others next winter."

"Next winter!" he exclaimed. "Yes, if—"

She nodded and smiled at him. "Oh, yes; you will be here next winter. You will be able to walk and go about by that time."

"We'll climb the Schatzpitz together," he said, eagerly. The faintest tinge of colour came into her face. No one had ever wanted her to climb the Sweetheart-peak before.

"Who knows?" she smiled.

But it would not do. Two invalids, and both

The Valley of the Great Shadow

very ill! He had not thought of their ages, either; but she had, and it was not right to let him love her. She was poor, too, poorer than he—so poor that she would not be able to afford another winter in the Mittenthal, though she could not live in the lower air. She would soon have to go, and the one romance of her life must end with life. It would have been a comfort to have stayed beside him, if only as a friend; but that she could not afford. No, she must go.

She shook herself firmly, while her heart dropped like lead. In all her forty years no one had ever loved her till now. And she must go away and leave love and life.

“Child, Child!” Merridew said, brokenly.

The bus was at the door, and she had come to say good-bye to him. She held out her hand, smiling bravely.

“I wanted to tell you,” she said; “to thank you—it has made me so rich. I can’t forget, ever. You have given me—the happiest months of my life.” The laugh was still in her eyes—a little mirthless breeze that shook the words out in gusts.

He took her hand, but all the words that came to him were “Child, Child, Child!” over and over again.

She clung to him, looking into his eyes, sunken with weeping. His hopeless face killed her.

Merridew

"Make the poor souls happy—as you made me. Ah, no! that is quite impossible. But help them, as you help me, to face death smiling."

"Child!" he sobbed; "Child!"

"I thought—perhaps—do you mind?—you would kiss me," she said.

His arms clung about her. "Life might at least have given us Love," he said, bitterly.

She drew herself trembling from his arms.

"No, not Love," she gasped; "but Life gives Death, and—Death is Love."

That was four years ago, and Merridew was still trying to do what she had done—to lift a corner of the weight of life from poor souls. It made his life in Mittenplatz very busy. And the Professor called him a fool.

He went tobogganing with Miss Blake that night. The toboggan-run was just outside the hotel; it sloped into the meadows where the Grünwasser flowed. The snow upon the run was set and hard and slippery from the passing of sleighs. When Merridew and Miss Blake pushed off from the top their toboggans sheered down the hill, skimming along the ice like winged creatures. The moon was full, and the moonlight flooded over snow and sky, blotting out the stars. White-robed in snow, white-veiled in light, the meadows lay asleep. It was in these

The Valley of the Great Shadow

meadows that Merridew and The Child had gathered their flowers.

Miss Blake was at the end of the run. Merridew slowly dragged his toboggan up the hill. His face was white in the moonlight. Presently Miss Blake came up the hill, too. At the top they rested on their toboggans.

"How still it all is," she said. "There is something weird in this Alpine moonlight. You and I might be ghosts, pausing before we slipped down into our valley of death."

"There is nothing ghostly about you," he said, with the stress on the pronoun.

"And yet, when I feel the sweep and rush of the toboggan down the hill, it almost seems as if I were going into the very depths of silence."

He gave her a sympathetic look that did not miss the strain on her thin face. He liked Miss Blake. She sometimes reminded him of The Child. She was kind and helpful, and until lately had been one of the most cheerful persons in the hotel. Then there had been a coolness in her friendship with the Professor, and the life had gone out of her face.

"Something wrong with your liver," he suggested.

"No, it's ghosts!" she cried. "This place is full of them. They are all round us—the ghosts of the people that have died here, and the ghosts of their friends' thoughts that come back seek-

Merridew

ing them, and the ghosts that are to be. They troop up and down the road. They make me feel sad. Sometimes I wish I were a ghost, too," she added, wistfully.

"Certainly not," said Merridew. "We should all protest against that. I don't know why you see ghosts here. To me the place is full of life. I walk along, and see the glad faces of the people that are being cured; and if ghosts come back, they come with the radiant faces of those that were here ill and are now strong and healthy. Every ray of sun, every snowflake, brings a message of life to some one in the valley. It is almost impossible to die here."

"I sometimes wish I could die," she said, with a nervous laugh. Merridew thought how easy it was for healthy people to wish for death. He had intended going in, but the catch in her voice made him change his mind.

"I'll race you down the hill," he said, lightly.

The toboggans were already in line. She looked up at him with a queer smile.

"Yes, let us race, and the one who gets first to the river shall be the first 'ghost.' "

With a crunch of steel the runners took the road, neck to neck, flying down like live things. Neither Merridew nor Miss Blake put any check on the pace. The air flogged them back, its lash stinging across their faces; but they flew on, neck to neck, down the slope. The shadow of a big

The Valley of the Great Shadow

boarding-house blackened the snow. Neck to neck they swept across it, and came out together into the moonlight. A whirr and a rush, and they were at the sharp turn into the valley.

With a mad sweep they plunged forward, twisting round the corner, neck to neck still. She had the disadvantage of the outside, and at the turn he gained a yard or two. As the toboggans slowed she leaned forward, dug her pegs into the ground, and shot abreast with him.

She sprang up, and her voice rang triumphantly across the moan of the Grünwasser:

"I won! I won!"

"No," Merridew panted; "I was first in."

"I passed you at the finish."

Her tone surprised him. He glanced at her, and saw her face change in the moonlight.

"Yes, I say again, you kill yourself," Dr. Engel repeated. "Tobogganing last night was the act of a fool."

Merridew remained obstinate.

"A little pain more or less, what does it matter?" he said. "A man must use up the waste ends. My life is a waste end of rope; it may be useful to piece out another man's rope."

"You may make the rope long enough to hang him with," said Engel, "and yourself, too."

"Do you think with care I could last out the winter?" Merridew asked.

Merridew

"With care," Engel answered.

He was writing out a prescription. Merridew studied the face, with its mouth pursed over the writing. He knew every feature of it by heart, every line on the fine forehead, every flash of the keen eyes. He knew every wrinkle in the waistcoat, where the figure broadened. He had given up criticising Engel's clothes since he had learned that the Doctor sacrificed his clothes and his appearance to his theory of the destruction of possible germs. Merridew looked at him now with the devotion of the hero-worshipper. He had not forgotten his illness during the influenza time, when Engel had sat up with him while the Doctor's own temperature was high with fever.

"If I go on as usual, Doctor, how long do you give me?" he asked, when Engel had finished.

The Doctor laid the prescription on the table.

"They tell me the ice-run is in excellent condition," he said.

"Capital!" said Merridew. "Royston made the run in eighty seconds yesterday."

"That was very rapid. Ach! it is glorious sport. I will look in to-morrow. Good day."

Merridew looked quizzically at the disappearing figure. "I might have known he wouldn't tell me," he said to himself. "I suppose the game is nearly up, and if I go on as usual it will be over the sooner. Granted I am a fool, what does a month more or less matter? Dear little

The Valley of the Great Shadow

Child, I shall find you again. Let them say I am a fool. At least I do something to lift the weight of life; I show them how to face death smiling."

He turned painfully on his pillow. "I had better get up, or Miss Blake will think it was the tobogganing last night. I shouldn't like her to know how nearly I won that race into Ghostland."

He dressed himself with difficulty, resting often, and dragged himself downstairs. The public rooms were empty; no sound of talking came from the balcony. So much the better. If no one was there, he could lie quietly in the sun. He went slowly to the balcony, and faced a row of figures lying silent and melancholy on the *chaises longues*.

A sudden vigour straightened his back; he stepped briskly towards them, rubbing his hands.

"What, Miss Busybody, no smile, no welcome? Are all the beauties asleep, waiting for the Prince?"

Miss Busybody, who was sitting on Philippa's knee, hid her face and began to cry. Philippa drew her closer in her arms, and raised a sad face to Merridew.

"We are all so sorry because Sonnie Baker is worse. They have telegraphed for his aunt."

"No one should be sorry," said Merridew. "I would give everything I have to die as nobly as that boy."

Merridew

The other people began to discuss Sonnie's sacrifice. Simplicity Baldwin turned impatiently. Her glance took in Merridew's stoop, the trousers bagged at the knees, the queer, angular way—more pronounced than usual—in which he carried himself.

"I wish he wouldn't rub his hands and grin in that ghastly fashion," she said, irritably. "I wish they'd stop talking of Sonnie. It's bad enough to have him dying without seeing a clown at the bedside."

"Merridew looks rather foolish," said Major Sanderson, "but he is a good fellow, amusing and good-natured, though he's dying, poor devil."

"You don't say he's dying!" Simplicity exclaimed. "That man!"

"You can't tell—these chronic cases—"

"My! if he isn't proposing fancy dress!" she interrupted. "It's not a bad idea. It would give us something besides Sonnie to think of." Her face brightened. She ran across and joined the group of which Merridew was the center. He had banished the gloom. They were discussing costumes and characters as if Sonnie Baker had never charmed them by his violin or saddened them by his fate.

The Professor growled more than ever that day. The talk at Merridew's end of the table had never been gayer. When night came, and

The Valley of the Great Shadow

the fancy dresses filed in to dinner, a clown took Merridew's chair.

"He looks more natural than all the other fools," said the Professor.

"I wish he hadn't chosen that dress," said Miss Blake, timidly. She and Philippa were the only women who had not forgotten that Sonnie lay dying.

The *salle-à-manger* was full of gay voices. Every one was talking and laughing, and criticising the dresses; but above the din was the incessant jingle of the bells in Merridew's cap. The eyes under the bells made Philippa uncomfortable. She had had a glimpse in them of a creature in pain.

"I wish he didn't know that you called him a fool," she said to the Professor.

"Fiddles!" he grunted. "Did him good. You see how well the cap fits."

"He is wiser and more unselfish than we are," she said. "See what he does to keep people from being bored."

"More fool he," the Professor said.

At last ten o'clock came. The impromptu dance following the dinner was over. The jingle of Merridew's bells had kept time with the music, and no one had noticed that he did not speak. Under the paint no one had seen the ashes on his face.

Merridew

He had managed to get to his room, but he had only strength enough to crawl to the couch. He could not even ring the bell. But he was suffocating—that heavy cap! But his arms were heavy, too; he could not raise them. He tried to moisten his lips; the paint sickened him. He gasped, choking. He could not tear off the ruffle that was strangling him. He must have help. He rose, steadying himself by the table under the mirror. Seeing his reflection in the glass, his lips parted in a ghastly smile.

“The Professor will say that I am a—”

The sentence was finished by the jangle and jar of bells crashing as he fell forward on his face.

CHAPTER VI

THE PROFESSOR

"You have taken the salt from me, ma'am; I'll thank you for it." Miss Blake did not hear the Professor. She was sitting at table d'hôte, but her thoughts were not there. She looked pinched and haggard. The colour had not come back into her face since morning, when she had heard that Merridew had won the race into Ghostland. She was straining her ears to catch the sounds in the hall, the stealthy bustle and muffled noises which told that the dead man was being carried from the hotel to his lonely state in the mortuary. As she thought of it, she could scarcely keep up the pretence of eating.

Then she nearly sprang out of her chair, for the Professor had jogged her elbow.

"The salt, ma'am; the salt," he said, testily. "One salt-cellar has to serve us both, as you know very well, and you have taken it."

"You can have the salt; but I didn't take it from you," she answered. Her voice was under better control than her hand. It shook when she pushed the salt towards him.

"Take care—you will spill it," he said, gruffly.

The Professor

But the spoon had already tumbled over, and the cloth was sprinkled with salt.

"Dear me, dear me!" she faltered. "It is such a bad omen."

"Couldn't be worse," the Professor said, cheerfully. "Bad luck; you can't escape it."

"Throw some salt over your left shoulder," suggested Philippa, seeing Miss Blake's agitation. "That counteracts the bad luck."

"No, no," Miss Blake stammered. "I will make a cross."

Her finger trembled as she traced a cross on the salt. The Professor looked on cynically.

"A pack o' nonsense," he grunted.

"I am afraid I am very silly," she said, apologetically.

"You are a woman," he answered.

His rough voice was heard distinctly in every part of the *salle-à-manger*. Merridew's empty chair had struck a silence across the chatter. The echo of the bells he had worn the night before was still in the room. The people at his end of the table were trying to forget that his place would know him no more forever.

The silence following the Professor's remark was so deep Miss Blake felt that every one must hear the tears rushing to her eyes. It seemed impossible to check them; but she would not betray herself, and she mastered her voice and answered the Professor.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

"To be a woman is punishment sufficient."

From behind his spectacles he gave her a keen look.

"Ho, ho!" he laughed. "It is, it is."

Philippa glanced at Miss Blake with pleased eyes. She had not expected her to show such spirit.

Then Miss Blake pushed away her plate and rose, with a pale smile. "I find the room very close," she murmured.

The Professor gazed blankly after her retreating figure, then went on with the book he was reading. But the pages remained unturned, and he refused the dishes at his elbow. His frown drew his bushy brows together till they met. He missed the roar of fierce argument on erudite topics with Miss Blake. He had been in the Mittenthal for ten years, and she was the first woman he had known with whom logical argument was possible. Miss Blake had spent twenty years in reading heavy treatises to her Aunt Sabina, and in arguing over them afterwards. In this manner Aunt Sabina had encouraged independence of thought, while discouraging every sign of her niece's independence of action.

The Professor resented Miss Blake's leaving the table, although for several days he had not spoken to her. He had come to look upon her almost as his personal property. She made things comfortable for him. His chair, screened

The Professor

now and cushioned, was always ready for him in the sunny corner of the balcony. There was always a footstool and his favourite armchair waiting empty in the reading-room. No one was ever reading the *Times* when he wanted it. He never had to grumble over cold soup, however late he came to table. And at night Miss Blake was always at hand to read to him or to play chess. These things he had noticed, but there were others that he had not noticed. Babette, upstairs, kept his bedroom fire going all day. He had had to stint himself in firewood before, but now the box of wood never seemed to fail. He did not see that his flannels were thicker and warmer. His bed was unusually comfortable, but he had not discovered the hot-water bottle that warmed it, nor the English eiderdown that had taken the place of the Swiss "plumeau."

No one ever saw Miss Blake arranging these things, and Babette would have died rather than betray her. But since Babette's illness Henriette had been waiting on the Professor, and Henriette's long tongue was responsible for the Professor's changed manner to Miss Blake.

But he could not keep up his coolness to her. He missed her too much. She had become necessary to him; and if she interfered with the arrangement of the furniture in his bedroom, she had done it out of kindness. After all, the room was cosier for the screen that she had sent

The Valley of the Great Shadow

him; he need not have been huffy about it. That temper of his was unbearable. It had made him call Merridew a fool, and Merridew had died before he could apologise for the insult. It had made him quarrel with the only woman worth speaking to in the hotel.

The Professor suddenly pushed his chair away, making a great clatter, and stumped out of the dining-room. He stumped into the hall and put on his coat and hat. Frau Bullen stood at the door, looking after a group of figures passing slowly along the snow. Her smile for the Professor was worn and faded. Then she dropped her assumption of unconcern, and allowed him to see her tears.

"There goes a brave heart," she said, nodding towards the road. "People will never know how brave that man has been. He had his own troubles, but no one ever knew them. He was very poor, too. Imagine it, Professor!—not enough money to pay for the grave."

"Then—" the Professor cried, horrorstruck.

"Yes," said Frau Bullen, sadly; "the town will give the grave."

The Professor turned on his heels angrily, and took the road. The more he thought of it the more vexed he was that Merridew should miss even the poor dignity of his own grave. If he could have afforded it, he would have paid for a grave for him. The Professor had strong views

The Professor

on the subject. He was poor himself, but he had not rested until he had saved enough money to buy a grave and pay the expenses of his funeral. To have owed his grave to municipal charity would have seemed to him tantamount to spending eternity in the poorhouse. But the fate he had avoided for himself had overtaken Merridew.

The Professor shuffled along the road in his snow-shoes. He dug his stick into the snow at every step. It was a horrible thought to him that Merridew should not be able to pay for a grave. He walked on, with bent head, fuming, never noticing how long he had been walking. All at once he pulled up and stared about him. He had reached the *friedhof*. He stood looking blankly at the ranks of white stones rising from the white snow, at the billowy waves that every winter rolled farther down the valley. In the free allotment two men stood measuring the snow.

The Professor ground his teeth when he saw them. He slouched his hat over his eyes and shuffled away, a quaint figure in his caped coat and big hat and blue goggles that shielded his eyes from the glare. A few yards from the gate he paused and looked back.

"What does it concern me?" he snarled.
"The man and his grave are nothing to me."

He went on sullenly towards the village; then

The Valley of the Great Shadow

he stopped again and looked back over his shoulders.

"You are a fool, a ridiculous old fool!" he addressed himself. "A fool," he repeated, with a change of tone. "A fool," and his voice softened; "a fool," it dropped to regret.

He dug his stick into the snow; then he retraced the road, and shuffled up the path of the *friedhof* to the free allotment, where the men were measuring out a grave for Merridew.

"Stop that!" he growled, speaking in German. "There has been a mistake. I have come to choose the grave for my friend. It is I who bear the expenses of the funeral."

He glanced towards a pine-tree standing in a clearing among the tombstones. There was no grave there, but the space had been bought. The Professor's face twitched as he saw the tree. The little freehold was his own. His steps lingered as he led the men to the spot. He walked slowly, following his dead pride to the place of burial.

Coming out of the *friedhof* he stepped briskly. After all, it was not such a sacrifice, he said to himself. He did not need the place himself, and by the time his turn came he might be able to save enough money to pay for a second piece of ground. He was walking quite energetically. It was as if in giving up the preparations he had made for his death he had postponed death itself.

The Professor

Passing the mortuary, he paused a second and lifted his hat. He wished he could think that Merridew knew he would lie in a grave of his own.

Beyond the mortuary were meadows sloping to the Grünwasser, where a score of people were tobogganing. He recognized Simplicity Baldwin by her red dress, and he stopped to watch her racing Royston and another man. He did not think her heartless to be amusing herself so near to the place where Merridew was lying. She was not heartless. With a good many of the other healthy people in the valley she ignored death when it came near. She had persuaded Miss Blake to come out tobogganing, and poor Miss Blake had set aside her personal feelings and joined Simplicity.

"It is what dear Mr. Merridew would have approved of," she told herself. But there was no pleasure for her in the sport. Her nerves were unstrung, and when she pushed off from the top of the hill she was reminded of that race which Merridew had won. The remembrance shook her. She trembled, and lost control of her toboggan in the moment when the pace quickened.

The Professor caught sight of her just as she pushed off, and he looked on, wondering why she was steering so badly. Suddenly there was a scream, followed by a burst of laughter from the bank.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

Miss Blake's toboggan had been overturned, and her red-flanneled legs were beating the air. The instant after, a confused heap of skirts, she went rolling down the hill.

Simplicity Baldwin, on the bank, held her sides and laughed till the tears ran down her face. The more decorous turned away from Miss Blake's humiliation, but the younger ones did not spare her. "Funny old thing!" "What a figure she cut!" sounded everywhere.

The Professor's face blazed as he heard them. Then he seized Simplicity's toboggan and swung himself down after Miss Blake, who had got up and was shaking the snow from her skirts.

She was not hurt, but the Professor insisted on giving her his arm; and he led her up the bank, his blue goggles hurling defiance at the hastily composed faces that hurried to meet them. He went through the group, protecting Miss Blake from their solicitude, and he insisted on taking her back to the hotel.

By the time they reached the Royal the embarrassment on her face had disappeared before her happiness at their restored friendship. She went to her room palpitating, assuring herself that she did not mind her fall. Miss Blake, with her straight hair and flat face and china-blue eyes, looked like a Dutch doll, and was full of sentiment. She studied her face in the glass, smoothing down the lank bands that started

The Professor

from the parting and went down over the ears. Her Aunt Sabina had taught her to dress it so twenty years ago, and she had never thought of changing the fashion. Her skimpy gown showed her figure with cruel exactness. She pinned it tighter yet across her flat chest. The stuff was poor. It had not occurred to her that she could afford a better material than she had worn in her aunt's lifetime. Aunt Sabina's heiress was as badly dressed as Aunt Sabina's humble companion had been.

Yet she was not dissatisfied with the face in the glass. There was something unaccustomed in it—the light and shade of an emotional play that made her eyes wistful. She moved away from the glass, when a knock interrupted her scrutiny of herself.

Philippa Joy came in hesitatingly. Her directness and energy were gone, her eyes were not as bright as usual.

"May I come in, Miss Blake? Babette is sleeping, and Dr. Engel has just gone, so I can stay a little. I want to talk to you; I am so tired."

"You poor child! Come and sit here by the fire. I am just going to make tea. You look worn out. You shouldn't stay so much with Babette."

"I like to," Philippa said, wearily. "She is so bright, and so glad to be getting well. Miss

The Valley of the Great Shadow

Blake, I think if it wasn't for Babette I would go back to England."

Miss Blake was bustling with teacups. She gave Philippa a vague, baffled look. "But, my dear, wouldn't Dr Engel have something to say against that."

"No," said Philippa; "he would be glad if I went."

Miss Blake set down the teacups and came and took Philippa's hand.

"My dear, tell me all about it."

"It is this," said Philippa. "I love him with all my heart, and I thought he loved me. He doesn't. That is all."

She bit her lips and stared into the fire. "What am I to do?" she said at last.

"Nothing," said Miss Blake. "It is, of course, strange to me to hear a woman speak openly of love, but you belong to the younger generation. My dear, the Doctor is a hard man; you will marry some one worthier of yourself. Be patient. Life is only just begun."

"A hard man?" Philippa blazed up, springing to her feet and glaring at Miss Blake. "Little you know him! He is tenderness itself—tenderer than any woman. His life is beautiful—so lonely, so unselfish. He is better than any saint."

"My dear, I have no doubt he is a very worthy person," said Miss Blake, primly. "Indeed, I

The Professor

hear of his kindness on every side, but it is the kindness of the doctor, not of the man. I could wish that you had placed your affections elsewhere. When I contrast Dr. Engel with such a man as the Professor—”

“The Professor!” Philippa exclaimed. “Do you name the Professor on the same day with a man like Dr. Engel?”

“Indeed, my dear, I do,” said Miss Blake, earnestly. “His chivalry, his good heart, his consideration—”

Philippa burst into a ringing laugh, and gathered Miss Blake into her arms.

“Oh, Miss Blake, you are delicious! We won’t quarrel about our friends. There! I feel better already. I won’t go back to England. I don’t want to. I love the Mittenthal—it is fascinating; and I can help people if I stay—people like Babette, you know. And you will be here to comfort me when I feel very lonely, and you will be my friend. There! forgive me, I have rumbled your hair.”

She kissed Miss Blake, and drew away and gazed at her in surprise. The faded face had lighted up, the hair she had ruffled lay in rings, softening the flat lines of the face. The tenderness in the eyes warmed their cold blue. Suddenly they were misty.

“My dear,” Miss Blake faltered, “I have never had a friend. It is too much to hope that

The Valley of the Great Shadow

a bright young creature like you—should love me!”

“Nonsense!” said Philippa. “Come here; look at yourself. Isn’t that a face to be loved?”

“My dear, my dear!” Miss Blake hid her face, blushing.

“Yes,” said Philippa. “Now sit down. I am going to do your hair for you.”

The girl would not be resisted. Finally Miss Blake sat down, and Philippa fluffed out a ringlet here, and pulled a strand there, and turned the hair back, softening the lines. Miss Blake scarcely recognized herself. Her face was fuller, her eyes larger and darker under the friendly curls.

“Dear me, I scarcely recognise Jane Blake,” she said, with a gratified laugh. “But this gown does not become the headdress.”

“No, it doesn’t,” Philippa said, quickly. “None of your frocks do you justice. Wait a minute; let me put some lace on that bodice, and show you what I mean.”

Miss Blake went slowly downstairs. In the pleasure of the transformation Philippa had worked she had quite forgotten the toboggan episode. She stood aside to let the Professor pass.

“Is it you?” he said. “Bless my soul, what have you been doing to yourself?”

The Professor

He put on his spectacles and looked her up and down. She blushed under his gaze.

"'Pon my soul, it's made a young girl of you. Well, well, I feel like a musty old folio beside a Temple classic."

That night there was a sensation at table d'hôte. It was not only that Miss Blake had suddenly lost her resemblance to a Dutch doll; for the first time in memory the Professor had appeared at table in a white tie and a black coat of some antiquity.

One morning he stood in the hall examining his great coat. The coat was certainly his; there was his name and the name of the tailor who supplied his clothes printed on the silk strap inside, and yet there seemed to be something different about it. But he couldn't be mistaken. He put on the coat, turned round, and saw Miss Blake.

"Hm! Going shopping, I suppose?"

"No, Professor; I thought of walking across the lake."

"That will suit me. I have business at the Grünwald."

The Grünwald was an inn at the other side of the lake. The sun had not yet climbed the Rosenalp, and as they came out of the hotel the cold slashed their faces, but in the distance Pitzendorf shone in the sunlight. The light glis-

The Valley of the Great Shadow

tened on Seehorn and Schwarzhorn and Weiss-horn, and the chalet windows held flashing fires of sunrise. The hotel omnibus came along the road with a clashing of bells, and Karl the porter took off his hat as it passed.

"Confound him!" grumbled the Professor, crushing his wideawake over the bald place that the cold had bitten.

"Don't confound him," said Miss Blake, with a gay little laugh. "He is such a nice young man. Have you heard that he and Babette are to be married as soon as she has got over her illness?"

"Yes; and I think them foolish young people."

"I don't agree with you. A love-match is always wise."

The Professor stopped and stabbed the snow with his stick. There was a threat behind the blue goggles.

"What! love-matches wise? And I thought you were a sensible woman, remaining single because you saw the folly of matrimony."

"I am not single for choice," she said, cheerfully. "No one ever asked me to marry."

"Then I congratulate you. So you've never been in love?"

They were close to the church that spread itself across the road at the foot of the Pitzenberg. The tower was square and plain, crowned by two tiers of arched windows supporting a

The Professor

cupola. The plaster was stained with age, but the stains were rose and blue and green, youth's colours. Through the tower windows could be seen the bells, hanging silent.

Miss Blake turned away from the Professor's gaze. There was a certain embarrassment in her air. She looked up at the weather-vane above the cupola. The wind was in the north. Her eyes dropped to the church door, with its brass slit under the *armen-kasse*.

"They talk of pulling down this quaint old church," she said, unsteadily.

"Iconoclasts!" he growled. "An interesting example of Byzantine influence—and they pull it down in order to run up a hideous hotel."

"I hope they won't do that," she said.

They climbed the hill in silence, the Professor trying to hold himself straight and keep step with Miss Blake.

Suddenly he broke silence: "What is the use of marriage? What is the end of it, eh?"

She looked up, startled at his tone, and her gaze flitted about and found nothing to rest on.

"My Aunt Sabina used to say the end of marriage was the mending of socks," she said, with an effort at control.

The Professor gave her a suspicious glance. But no, she could not possibly know the state of his wardrobe. Besides, it was a long time since he had worn a hole in his socks.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

"The man who burdens himself with a wife is a fool," he went on. "He pulls down his tower of silence, embodying the fine influences of the past, and runs up in its place a noisy, clattering, vulgar hotel."

The lake was before them, its level snow edged by road and pine wood. The snow glittered, every crystal a flash and a gleam; but the road was in shadow. It wound on to the Todtenberg, the dead mountain, on which no living thing would grow. On the lake was a circle of blocks of ice. The blocks were clear and blue; they imprisoned the summer sky, and where the sun touched them they glanced like diamonds. To the Professor they only suggested Stonehenge, and they set him talking of Druidical circles and barrows and tumuli, and the ways in which different ages disposed of the dead.

He handled the subject with gusto. Miss Blake listened, a pale shadow on her face, a deprecating pain in her eyes. Suddenly he stopped.

"What's the matter with you, ma'am? You are very uninteresting to-day."

"Am I?" she said, rousing. "I was thinking of Mrs. Royston's love-story, and wondering how many romances had begun and ended on this lake."

"It's been the ruin of Royston's life that he ever had any love-story. He would have done

The Professor

better to have gone under the ice than to have skated on it with that girl when he did."

"Oh, Professor!" said Miss Blake, shocked.

"Yes, ma'am!" the Professor said. "You had better die than drag out a ruined life. It is I that tell you so. Death is always dignified. Life is sometimes an indignity. And life with a woman who forces herself on a man, as Royston's wife did, is the most undignified of all lives. Marriage is always ruin, and Royston's marriage has damned him."

Miss Blake's lips, tightly pressed together, were marked by a white line. Her voice fluttered when she spoke.

"Do you see, Professor, we are close to the Grünwald? There is the ice-run. How steep it looks! I should like to toboggan down it some day."

"Do you want to commit suicide, young woman?"

"I had not thought of it as suicide, Professor."

"For you it would be suicide. Only an expert could come safely down that run. You are not an expert. You toboggan very badly indeed."

Miss Blake thought of her accident, and a thin flush showed on her strained face. She was silent.

The Professor's business at the Grünwald was to eat great slices of rye bread and goat's-milk cheese, and to drink German beer. When he had finished they set out again.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

"You are positively stupid to-day," he said to Miss Blake, going down the Pitzenberg. "What has happened to you?"

The clash and wrangle of bells pealing from the church-tower prevented his hearing her answer.

"Do you hear? Some poor devil has committed the suicide of matrimony," he shouted in her ear.

At the door of the Hotel Royal he detained her.

"What is wrong with you? I am sure I didn't say anything to hurt you to-day, did I?"

She gave him a pale smile, shook her head, and hurried away upstairs.

The Professor stared after her; his mouth dropped.

"Boh! I have you!"

Miss Busybody darted out from behind the coats and seized his legs.

"What! what! Hillo! Oh, it's you, you small hurricane. You nearly blew me over."

"Where's my Christmas-card you promised me and never gave me?" she said, reproachfully.

"Didn't I? didn't I? But I bought it. Yes, I know I bought it. It's in my pocket somewhere. Tush! where's the confounded thing?"

His hands went plunging in and out of his pockets, Miss Busybody's shining eyes darting after each.

The Professor

"It's here! I know it's here!" he said, irritably. "A wretched thing of a grey kitten, like Fifi; I bought it for the likeness."

"It must be in the pocket of your old coat," the child said.

"An old coat? I haven't an old coat," he said, crossly. "It must be here somewhere. This is the only overcoat I have, and I put the card in the pocket."

"No, it isn't your only overcoat," she said, with a knowing look. "This one is your new one, that Miss Blake hung on the peg when she took away the old one. I know, for I saw her. It was Christmas morning, when I was hidder watching for the Christ-kind. And Dr. Engel came, and Miss Blake hidder, too. Can I ask her to let me look in the old coat for the card?"

The Professor did not answer; his mouth had dropped again.

"May I, Professor, may I?" cried Miss Busybody, prancing round him.

"Certainly not!" he shouted. "Certainly not! If you mention that confounded card—coat—card—to anybody, I'll cut your head off and bury you in my own grave."

He went slowly up the stairs, frowning and fuming. This came of letting women into his life. It was horrible! indecent! She gave him a screen, and he had forgiven her. And now an overcoat. That was unpardonable. No man

The Valley of the Great Shadow

would stand it. She would go on doing these things till he would be obliged to marry her in self-defence, like poor Royston. And ruin his life, and his calculations of solar eclipses! If he married, they would never be finished. He would have to go away. There was nothing for it but flight. And, after all, since he no longer had a grave in the *friedhof*, there was nothing to keep him in the Mittenthal. He could live just as well in one of the other Alpine stations. "Confound you! come in," he shouted.

Frau Bullen came in, with a mysterious lowering of her eyes. "I wished to say, Professor," she whispered, "if you would rather not bear the expenses of poor Mr. Merridew's funeral, there is some one else who is anxious to do it—"

The Professor brought his brows together, frowning horribly. "No, ma'am!" he thundered. "I have gone forward, and I will not go back. God knows it may be the salvation of me that I have got rid of that grave, and can leave this hole of designing women."

CHAPTER VII

MISS BLAKE

Miss Blake stood at her window looking at the piled-up snow that had blotted out the roads across the valley. There had been a great storm, keeping every one in the hotel for three days, but to-day the sun shone again, and the valley was a wonder of gleaming white.

The snow seemed to have fallen on Miss Blake's face, blotting out lines, making it a white blank without expression. Her eyes were dull, her figure limp and depressed. There was no one to ask her what ailed her. She might be as miserable as life, and the Professor would not grumble at her. She could have borne his roughest mood better than the silence of the last three days.

Tears gathered in her eyes and dimmed the shining valley and the snow-muffled châteaux. The Pension Tannenwald was half-buried in drifts. Miss Blake wondered what the people there were doing, cut off from Mittenplatz as certainly as she was cut off from the happiness of life.

She could see nothing for the tears that attended the death of her hopes. She pressed

The Valley of the Great Shadow

her hands together, striving to conquer them. They had been her portion ever since the Professor had gone away.

If there had been any reason for his absence she would not have felt it so much; but he had left the hotel without a word of explanation to any one, and she was miserable at this end to their friendship.

She remembered their arguments, the daily walks together, the quarrels that had made them better friends. He had been the only figure in her world, and she missed him. She shrank from telling herself how much she missed him. She had wondered at Philippa's confession of love for a man who did not love her. Now, though she did not belong to the modern generation, she had to confess to something like love for the Professor, who had not treated her with common civility. She went out onto the balcony, and sat there miserably. Her heart was too heavy for tears now. She could not think; she could not even feel. She sat pressing her hands together, her blank eyes staring across the snow.

There were voices on the balcony just under her. Frau Bullen and Simplicity Baldwin were talking together. Their words had no meaning for Miss Blake.

"I have always liked the little old maid," Frau Bullen was saying, "but she has behaved

Miss Blake

very badly. Poor man! she has driven him away, I know. He told me himself he would not stay in this hole of designing women. Of course he meant her."

"My! I should think he meant nothing of the sort!" Simplicity cried. "Why, she is sweet—a perfectly lovely character. I don't call her a designing woman at all."

"You don't know," Frau Bullen sighed. "Henriette has told me. She has bought him flannels and stockings, because he was too poor to get them himself. Oh, she meant him to marry her. And he saw her arts, and has gone away to escape them."

"Poor little thing! the best thing for her," Simplicity cried. "I'd as lief marry a beetle as the Professor. But I presume he liked her. They were always together."

"Oh, as to that, he found her useful, of course. But that is not love. And she is a dowdy woman, without a sou."

"But she isn't dowdy. Her new gown is elegant."

"I suppose she dressed to attract him. Well, she won't find herself welcome at the Royal any longer."

"You are mistaken, Frau Bullen," Philippa's voice broke in. "Every one here loves her, while no one cared much for that bad-tempered old Professor. And if she gave him stockings,

The Valley of the Great Shadow

it's only what she has done for other people. She was going to give Babette her trousseau and all the house linen, and you can't say she wanted to marry Babette."

"I say she is throwing away the money she will need for herself," said Frau Bullen.

"She has plenty for herself and other people, too," Philippa went on. "Only yesterday Mrs. Royston told me what she had done for them; and she has paid for a south room for Sonnie Baker all winter. She invited Sonnie's aunt to come as her guest when he was taken ill. She is as good as she can be, and it makes me furious to hear your abominable scandals."

"I am not making scandals," protested Simplicity. "I admire Miss Blake. She is worlds too good for that snuffy old Professor."

Miss Blake stumbled into her room and closed the balcony door. She sank down on the sofa, shaking. Had they really been speaking of her? Was it she who had driven the Professor away? Oh, it couldn't be true! It couldn't be true!

She shrank into herself, and her face was pitiful. She twisted her fingers together, making a little moaning noise. What was this terrible thing that they were saying? How could she ever face these people again? A designing woman? Did he really think she was a designing woman?

Her face shriveled, her whole figure withered

Miss Blake

as if a blight had fallen upon her. The shame of it was more than she could bear.

And he had only found her useful. And that was not love. She cowered down and hid her face in her hands, and lay very still. Strength seemed to be ebbing out of her. She thought she was dying. She hoped she was dying. How could women live of whom such things were said?

"Miss Blake," Philippa called at the door.

The interruption sent the blood shuddering in her veins.

"I—am—resting—dear," she gasped.

"That's right. Don't forget that you have to go to the toboggan-race this afternoon. The ice-run is open again."

"Thank you, my dear, for reminding me."

Philippa had reminded her of the ice-run at the Grünwald.

"Do you want to commit suicide, young woman?"

She gave a strange little laugh as she tottered up.

"I am thinking of suicide, Professor."

The room was full of his voice. "You had better die than drag out a ruined life. It is I who tell you so. Death is always dignified."

Ah, yes, yes! How true he had been. Death would be dignified, and how much better than life after this! It would be an easy death; she

The Valley of the Great Shadow

knew the swift rush down, down, into the silence. It would not be different from her fall the other day. Merridew had had the start of her, but she would soon overtake him in the Ghostland to which she was going. Death was more dignified than life—ah, yes, yes! She only wanted death. And they would think it was an accident. He would never know that she had wished to commit suicide.

Thought whirled with thought in her brain. The spinning confusion dazed her. She laughed again, a queer, shaky laugh that matched the palsy of her shaking head. She held on to the back of the couch. What did people do who were going to die? What had Aunt Sabina done? Made a will? Yes; she must make her will. She would leave all she had to her friend. He was very poor, she knew. The money would atone for any trouble she had given him.

She remembered the wording of the deed of gift the lawyer had once drawn up for Aunt Sabina. She wrote out a similar deed. But she must have witnesses. Henriette and Marie, who could not read English. When the formality was over she sat staring at the envelope addressed to Professor Franklin. The beginning of the letter she had written to him drummed in her ears: "In case of my death." Then she might not die. But yes, death would be kind. She had been close behind Merridew in their

Miss Blake

race to Ghostland. It was a sign; she would soon overtake him now.

She was still shaking. As she went about the room setting things in order the little curls on her temples trembled. Even her thoughts, she felt, were trembling. "It is not seemly—to have such things said—it is not maidenly," she murmured, brokenly. "A reputation like that?—for me? Ah, no; death is more dignified."

She was tying the ribbons of her old-fashioned hat under her chin, carefully, before the mirror. She staggered back. She had seen in the glass the face Aunt Sabina had worn when she was dying. And Aunt Sabina had been an old woman, while she was comparatively young. He had told her once she looked like a girl. But now she was an old, old woman.

"If they see me, they will guess," she said, hoarsely. "At luncheon-time they carry out the dead. When they are at lunch I will go." She went stealthily downstairs. Her steps were heavy and slow and muffled. She was carrying out her dead—youth and hope and love and self-respect. She wondered if the people at table d'hôte would hear the heavy tread and know that the dead were passing.

The clouds had gathered again, and the sunless day pinched her face. She tottered as she walked, though the footway had been cleared of the thick snow. Snow was heavy on road and

The Valley of the Great Shadow

châlet and pine. The whole earth seemed muffled in the folds. They closed about the tottering figure on the path, and folded her also in thick silence. The silence was on her heart, a winding-sheet for the dead that lay there—Youth and Hope and Love. They were the children of her old age; she had scarcely learned to know their faces, and now the desire of her eyes was taken from her at a stroke. She was going forth alone to bury her dead.

At the bend of the road she met the light snowflakes. They covered her with tiny stars. The châlets at Pitzen were deep in snow. The mountains above them looked down with cold, white regard at the lonely woman toiling by. The morning she had walked with the Professor the sun had burnished the peaks, and the châlet windows had smiled rosily.

She stopped at the church at Pitzen and put all the money she had into the *armen-kasse*. Nothing was left in the purse but the card with her name and address.

Her feet dragged wearily as she climbed the Pitzenberg, but she took her way still where the road sloped to the river. She did not notice the snow deepening as she walked, or the weight of the toboggan dragging behind her. She was only conscious of the weight at her heart; she saw only the pale faces of her dead. "Youth

Miss Blake

and Hope and Love, Youth and Hope and Love," she kept on saying.

There was no diamond-flash on the lake. The blocks of ice stood shrouded. The shroud of the snow lay on everything; it was deep on the lake; she could scarcely make her way in places. But she did not notice the snow clogging her feet, dragging her back. It was right that she should go slowly, who followed the dead. Here he had talked of different modes of burial. Ah! he had not known then with what slow steps she would toil across the lake carrying her dead.

How many romances had been born and had died on that lake! Her romance lay stark in the death-chamber of her heart. It was only three months old. "Love and Hope and Love. Love and Hope and Love." Ah, it had been cruel. She was not a young woman, loving lightly to-day and leaving brightly to-morrow. She was one of those in whom Love was born slowly, with anguish and long travail. And now Love lay stark in the death-chamber. "Love and Love and Love. Love and Love and Love."

"You had better die than drag out a ruined life."

He had said that just here. She lifted the desperate pallor of her face to the cold pallor of the Todtenberg.

"I am thinking of suicide, Professor."

The Valley of the Great Shadow

The muffled bumping of the toboggan behind her was like the beat of a muffled drum.

She had reached the Grünwald. Yes, the path was clear. She dragged her toboggan up, up through the wood where the pines were weighted with snow, to the beginning of the ice-run. That also had been cleared of snow. She remembered that she had turned her eyes from seeing the end of the run, where the ice lay like a blade against the sheerness of the bank.

She seated herself on the toboggan, arranging her skirts carefully. A wistful smile flitted across her face. To-day there would be no Professor to help her up when she fell. Her thought staggered a little. She clutched at the sides of the toboggan. She steadied herself. This was weakness. Love was dead. There was nothing left.

It had grown very dark. The pines swayed strangely. They seemed bending towards her. Were those hands bringing snow that she might bury her dead? The beating of her heart was like death itself. It urged her on, whipping her lagging courage.

She jerked the toboggan, and it bounded forward like a horse springing to a race. Quicker and quicker, between the high white banks like the marble bed of a river. Quicker and quicker, between the high white walls like the walls of a grave. The scream of the runners ran along

Miss Blake

with the toboggan. It deafened her. Quicker and quicker, to get away from it! The white walls flashed past, quicker and quicker. The winged rush through the air was endless. Quicker and quicker. She closed her eyes. In her ears there was the thunder of steel scraping.

The Professor shuffled along the road, swearing at the untrodden path. Those three days in the Pension Tannenwald had been a horrible experience. He had had no screened seat on the balcony, no open fireplace and favourite armchair, not a single English paper, no friendly Frau Bullen. It was an infamous hole, only suited to the Germans who frequented it. His bed had not been aired, and that wretched plumeau was always falling off. Then the snowstorms had come and kept him a prisoner, with nothing to look at but the cheerful smoke of the Hotel Royal in the distance. And the only man beside himself treated him as if he were a bore—yes, a bore, though a cultured woman like Miss Blake—well, he didn't mind confessing at once that he had missed her. But she was a fool to have driven him out of the hotel, and he was a fool to go back again, having once escaped. And why had he hidden himself in the Tannenwald, where he had nothing to do but think of her? That confounded snowstorm! And now he was on his way back to her. He would tell

The Valley of the Great Shadow

her frankly that he cared for her, but he was too poor to marry; that he valued her friendship and companionship, and he hoped he had not forfeited either by his rudeness. There was a mild and human look about the Professor as he shuffled along, swearing because he had to make a path for himself through the snow.

He had climbed the hill down which Merridew and Miss Blake had raced, and he was hoping to slip unobserved into the Hotel Royal. But the hall was full of people. Simplicity's white face stood out whiter than all the rest. He went instinctively towards it.

"There has been an accident" she said. "Miss Blake—tobogganing. I feel kind of guilty. I made her toboggan. Oh, Professor, I would give worlds if I hadn't laughed at her that day she fell!"

"Is she hurt?"

Simplicity did not recognise his voice.

"They said she was dead."

"My God, it can't be!" he cried. "Killed tobogganing? Miss Blake killed tobogganing? It can't be!"

Frau Bullen came down the stairs, carrying a letter. She beckoned the Professor into the bureau and handed him the letter. She sat down.

"Isn't it dreadful, Professor?" she panted. "And nobody knows anything about her. This

Miss Blake

letter to you was on her table. Perhaps you should open it."

"That American girl said she was dead."

"We don't know; Dr. Engel is there still. He said no bones were broken—but— You see, she was tobogganing down the ice-run at the Grünwald. The whole length of the run had not been cleared of the snow. She seems to have tobogganed straight into the drift, and to have been thrown off. Nobody knows how long she had been lying in the deep snow when they found her. She was brought home two hours ago. Engel has been trying artificial respiration."

The Professor turned away and mechanically opened the letter Frau Bullen had given him. He read it through, and did not understand that Miss Blake had left him a fortune "in case of her death."

"Dead? She isn't dead! How could she be dead?" he said, hoarsely. Frau Bullen shook her head, and began to cry.

The Professor pushed past her to the door. The people in the hall fell to right and left, and did not speak as they saw his face. He walked straight into Miss Blake's room. She was on the bed, Dr. Engel and Philippa and a nurse with her.

Engel looked up, and made a sign for silence.

"She is asleep. She will do now," he said, in a low voice.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

The Professor looked vaguely from the Doctor to Philippa, who smiled and nodded at him; then he tottered into a chair and bowed his head on the table.

"Let us go away," said Philippa, softly.

Dr. Engel followed her into her sitting-room. He walked to the table, and turned over the books there. Then he glanced round at Philippa. Her mouth was still trembling, but she tried to smile.

"The poor old Professor! he is a dear!" she said.

"I hope he won't wake her," said Engel, trying not to smile.

A shred of paper fluttered out of the book he had in his hand. He picked it up. "A valuable bookmark, Miss Joy."

"Yes, it is valuable," she said, drily. "Don't you recognise your own writing, Dr. Engel?"

But Engel had already seen the "Philippa Alcestis" on the paper. "I didn't know trifles interested you," he said, coldly.

"It isn't a trifle," she answered. "I want you to tell me what it means."

"Alcestis was the wife of Admetus, whom Hercules brought from the dead."

"I know that," she said, impatiently. "But why *Philippa* Alcestis?"

"The Professor must have got over his emo-

Miss Blake

tion by this. I will return to my patient," said Engel.

"No," said Philippa, quietly. She stood before him, her face set with a strange determination, her eyes grave and steady.

"Dr. Engel, I want you to tell me what you had in your mind when you wrote that name?"

Engel returned her gaze by one equally fixed, but the lines on his face grew rigid as he looked at the girl. There was a long silence.

"I want to know." Philippa's voice was iron.

"It is not the sort of thing a man can tell." He spoke very quietly. His voice was iron, too.

"You may tell me," Philippa said.

Engel walked across the room, and stood with his back to her examining a picture. Ought he to tell her? Would it not be better for her to understand?

"Dr. Engel—" He turned round. The purpose on her face had strengthened.

"I want you to tell me," she said.

"If you will know—" he began, and stopped.

Philippa broke the long silence: "Yes, Dr. Engel."

"I had this in my mind," he said, speaking rapidly; "that the girl Philippa was herself Love, to me come back from the grave in which she had been lying. And I wrote for her some verses—"

The Valley of the Great Shadow

"Yes?" said Philippa again, but now voice and eyes were soft.

Engel dropped his eyes from hers. They moved him against his will.

"Then I tore up the verses."

"Why?"

He drew himself up, and stood straight before her, his face strong again.

"Because — because — Love had not — come back."

Philippa's fingers interlocked. She paused, hesitating; then she lifted her face with a proud light on it.

"I think you were wrong. Love *has* come back."

Her eyes leaped to his and held them. Engel could not fail to understand. An answering light flickered an instant on his face, went out, and left it dark.

"No," he said, sternly. "Love has not come back. It betrayed me once. I saw it in a woman's eyes, as I see it now. She was false. Love has ruined my life—"

"No, no!" Philippa cried. "It didn't ruin it. It has made it what it is, strong and noble and unselfish. Oh, you can't tell how fine your life is! And it is so pathetic, so lonely. Look, Dr. Engel; I wrote some verses, too. May I show them? There—see how you look to me!"

She opened her blotting-pad and took up a

Miss Blake

sheet of paper. "It was in the snowstorm yesterday," she went on, excitedly. "The whole valley was dead; not a single creature moved in it, not a sleigh, not a dog. And the snow fell and fell and fell. And then in that awful storm I saw you plunging through the snow, knee-deep; and I knew you were going across the valley to see poor Miss Lindsay. The snow lay round the rim of your hat—like an aureole. I knew you were one of God's saints, and I wrote this."

Her voice broke as she finished, tears were in her eyes. She handed the paper to Engel.

He took it from her, and the words danced before him through a mist.

Engel slowly folded the paper and put it in his pocket. His face was very white.

Philippa's eyes, fastened on him, saw the ice that had frozen it, and she understood.

"It is time I go back to my patient," he said.

All the light had faded out of the girl's face. She made a sudden step forward.

"Dr. Engel," she said, "you won't let me love you, but let me help you. Let me take a little of your work from you. Not the medical work, of course, but the nursing and the sympathy and the time you give to your patients." She smiled, though her lips were white, and held out her hand. "Will you let me be your helper?"

The Valley of the Great Shadow

Engel affected not to see her hand.

"I must really go now," he said, and brushed past her. At the door he paused and looked back.

"You make very good verses. Good-bye."

The voice was cynical, but she had seen the look in his eyes.

CHAPTER VIII

MR. JERNINGHAM

Mr. Jerningham came into the *salle-à-manger*, gave a weary look at the tables, then refused the chair that the waiter had drawn out for him.

"I will sit with my back to the light."

His voice was thin and high. It cut the silence like a fine blade. His face was melancholy; there was a plaintive droop in his eyes. He held his head on one side, as if his slight shoulders were not strong enough to support the weight. A delicate perfume from the violets in his buttonhole followed him.

"What a funny, funny man!" Miss Busybody said, in a whisper that penetrated to every corner of the room. "Do you see him, Philippa? Look, Uncle Rob! Why does he have long hair and talk like an old woman?"

"Be quiet, you little demon!" Major Sander-son laughed.

"Miss Busybody," said Philippa, quickly, to divert the child's attention, "I saw somebody awfully nice this morning. Guess who it was?"

"Dr. Engel," said Miss Busybody.

"Nice? Dr. Engel? Why, if a cow was round,

The Valley of the Great Shadow

I guess she'd eat that man, he's so green." Simplicity's accent flavoured Miss Busybody's curiosity.

"Dr. Engel is not green, he is red; and so is Philippa," Miss Busybody said.

"No; it was Sonnie Baker that I went to see," said Philippa, hastily. "He is sitting up again."

"I know," Miss Busybody nodded; "and Miss Baker says me and Boykin can go to tea with him soon."

Boykin was a recent arrival in the Mittenthal. He was only five years old, and he had consoled Miss Busybody in Sonnie's absence.

Mr. Jerningham having found a place to his mind, laid a book beside his plate, and began his lunch.

"Mercy on us, he is reading Elizabeth Barrett Browning!" Simplicity whispered. "I presume he wants us to take him for a poetical genius."

The Professor looked up from his discussion with Miss Blake. He was in a good temper. He beamed at her across a well-starched collar and smart tie.

"If you don't mind, Miss Impertinence, he will take you for what you are"; he addressed Simplicity.

"He may take me for better or for worse, I don't mind," she laughed.

"Oh, my dear, you should not jest on such subjects. We never know what will happen,"

Mr. Jerningham

said Miss Blake, who had reappeared at table that day, still weak from her accident. Then she blushed very much, and asked Philippa hurriedly if she knew the name of the stranger.

Between each course Mr. Jerningham read a poem, which, however, did not seem to affect his appetite. When the meal was over he walked drearily to the end of the table, where Major Sanderson sat. Miss Busybody saw him coming, and ran round to Philippa and hid her face on her lap. "I'm drefful frightened of him." Her voice came muffled from the folds of Philippa's gown.

"I had better tell you that you must take that child to the other table, or I must move my seat," Jerningham said.

Major Sanderson stared at him haughtily.

"It is your child, I think?" Jerningham went on. "I object to children in hotels, or at least at meals. She must leave the table or I must. She called attention to my appearance."

"But is that unusual?" Simplicity said, suavely.

"I came here to avoid observation," he said, sighing.

"If that's what you want, you go to work the wrong way," she smiled. "The minute folks set eyes on you they want to know more about you."

"I have an aversion to children," he said,

The Valley of the Great Shadow

pathetically; "my nerves are shattered, and they disturb me."

"Most all of us are invalids," said Simplicity; "but we're delighted to have a cunning little thing like Miss Busybody playing round. She don't disturb anybody."

"She disturbs *me*; she must go, or I must."

Philippa took Miss Busybody's hand and led her away from the discussion. The face Simplicity turned to Jerningham was as red as her dress.

"No one here wishes to keep you," she blazed out. She was a Kansas girl, and she had the sharpness of the type. She turned to Major Sanderson.

"Don't wait for Karl. Let me help you to the balcony, Major Sanderson."

Jerningham stared. He had not seen any signs of illness in the Major's sunburnt, cheerful face. Now he saw that he was a very sick man, walking with great difficulty, even with the help of Simplicity's strong arm. Her voice, strong, too, accompanied Major Sanderson. "He may take me for what he likes; I take him for a poor little woman-insect, with his nerves and his aversions—"

Jerningham shrugged his shoulders and waited till they had got out of the room. Then he found his new snow-shoes and his overcoat, and went out to see the village.

Mr. Jerningham

If anything could have charmed him, this glory of frost and snow and ice and sun must have done it, for the Mittenthal was like an open lily in the sun. But he saw only an Alpine village, less dreary than he had expected it to be. The road was gay with people strolling in the sun. Their coloured sunshades and bright dresses warmed the snow. The band outside the Kurhaus was playing, an undertone to the hubbub of tongues—French, German, Portuguese, Italian, Russian—that echoed through the garden. The people that lay on the *chaises longues* in the balconies did not look ill. The place was very cheerful indeed. But the people in his hotel were intolerable—that sick man and the child and that American. She looked very smart in her stylish red gown, but she was awfully vulgar. Would any English girl have spoken so? And he was an invalid, at the mercy of people like that! Tears gathered in his eyes. He was very sorry for himself. In the briskness and gaiety round him he had been walking vigorously. Now he drooped again, and took himself plaintively back to the hotel.

He did not move his seat at dinner. It was well placed for the courses, he had noticed.

Passing Simplicity's chair as he left the room, he dropped his visiting-card. She might pick it up, and see whom she had insulted. Americans were quick to recognise celebrities. The waiter

The Valley of the Great Shadow

handed him the card before he reached the door. He sighed as he took it. Why were waiters always so officious?

He went to his bedroom and threw open the balcony window. The stillness of the night made the darkness more intense, but dark as it was, the pale glimmer of the snow flitted ghost-like about the valley. Jerningham could almost have persuaded himself that he saw mysterious forms passing. He felt a new sensation of awe, and noted it.

"What a setting for music!" he said to himself. "This place is built on grand lines. The full sweep of this silence is magnificent. I wonder how it would tone in with the violin?"

He brought his violin, and standing on the balcony, touched the strings lightly.

At the first notes Miss Blake, who was lying on her own balcony, started up with a pleased cry. "It must be Sonnie playing again!" Then she knew that the touch was not Sonnie's. She lay listening in quiet content. After the storm of the day before there was a great calm in her life. She had come back to consciousness to find Love waiting for her with living eyes. She was still brooding over the wonder of it. The valley seemed full of mysterious forms that were glad; she could see their faces shining. In the balcony below her, Major Sanderson was looking at the same scene, and seeing in it the

Mr. Jerningham

solemn troops of his years passing. The procession would soon end now. The stillness in the valley was so intense he could almost hear the march of their feet. There were people lying on all the balconies, but there was no sound of gay chatter. It was the hour when those who have died in the Mittenthal return, and the wind of their garments chills the faces of the living—when people see the angel with the drawn sword who guards the gate of the valley, and remember that only the strong-armed can wrestle with him. It was the hour when the voice of one they call Death is heard from the mountains, as from mighty mosques summoning to prayer.

Jerningham was dimly conscious of a new influence in his music. He had spent the day without hearing the deep note that life struck in the Mittenthal. He had not seen the tragedy that played itself out with clash of cymbal and beat of drum in every seat at table d'hôte. He knew nothing of the depths of agony, the dark hopelessness that the laughter covered. "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," had not been said to him. He had had no soul to hear the language of inarticulate eyes. But all this was in his music, and he was dimly aware of it.

Some one joined Miss Blake on her balcony. "I wonder who it is playing," Jerningham heard.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

He touched the violin very lightly, so as to catch the reply. "I presume it's the new arrival. I saw a violin-case among his luggage."

"I wish he was the kind of man one could ask to play to Sonnie Baker. Miss Baker told me Sonnie was longing for some music. You might ask him, my dear."

"Why, Miss Blake, he isn't the kind of man I'd ask to tie a shoestring! A man who could snub Miss Busybody ain't likely to have humanity enough to play for a sick cat, let alone Sonnie. He's just a windbag of a man, and I want to prick him all the time and let the wind out. Besides, Sonnie wouldn't thank you for music like that. It's cheap compared with what Sonnie himself can do."

The balcony door banged as Jerningham went in. His playing "cheap," when he was a maestro, a man of European reputation? It was time some one put a stop to the criticisms of ignorant persons. There should be a penalty for defamation of the character of a man's art. To be disparaged by a girl! And she said he had no humanity. She wouldn't ask him to play for this boy. Well, he would not wait to be asked. He would offer to play. He did not mind spending ten minutes in doing it, since the boy was musical.

At breakfast next morning, while he pretended to read, he listened to the talk round him. He wished to discover which was Miss Baker.

Mr. Jerningham

The face of the conversation was disfigured with medical terms—microbe and bacteria, phthisis and carditis. Major Sanderson said cheerfully that his temperature was a hundred and one; another man gave the result of some microscopical examination or other. The Professor shouted across the table that Babette slept in flannel with the window wide open.

Jerningham had intended to speak about his loss of appetite as an interesting subject, but he remained silent.

Simplicity Baldwin came in, and spoke to the lady beside him: "How is Sonnie this morning, Miss Baker?"

"Better, I am thankful to say. Dr. Engel says he may get up again, but he is not to touch his violin yet. Poor Sonnie is dreadfully disappointed."

Jerningham stopped while helping himself to honey. "I gather that the boy is ill, and fond of music. I shall be glad to spare ten minutes to play for him. I am Horace Jerningham."

The name conveyed nothing to Miss Baker.

"You are very kind," she hesitated. "But—my nephew is very clever—and he is naturally extremely fastidious."

Simplicity's eyes twinkled delightedly.

Jerningham straightened himself.

"Perhaps you did not understand. I am Horace Jerningham, the violinist."

The Valley of the Great Shadow

Miss Baker flushed.

"It is very kind of you. Shall I say you will come in this morning? My nephew's number is ten."

Jerningham finished helping himself to honey. Suddenly Simplicity addressed him.

"I feel real mean at something I said about you yesterday. I ask your pardon. You're a stranger, and I presume you would like to see some of the local sights. I am going into the Grünwasser valley at midnight. Perhaps you would like to go, too."

"You have not said what you are going to see," he said, pleasantly. The girl had a fine face and an open, generous look in her eyes, and she had owned she had been unjust to him.

"To see the Todten-Volk—the dead people, you know," she answered. "The peasants say if you go to a certain spot in the valley at midnight, you will see all the dead folk pass in procession. They wear quaint old clothes, and their faces are covered—all but the last. He turns his face towards you, and it is the face of some one who will die this year."

"Grim enough," said Jerningham.

"Why, of course it's grim. It gives you thrills. Why, the last face may be your own."

"But does everybody see it?" said Jerningham.

She shrugged her shoulders. "But, at any

Mr. Jerningham

rate, it will be a sensation to see the valley at midnight."

"I should like to go with you," said Jerningham.

Two hours after, Jerningham took his violin to No. 10. Sonnie was on the sofa, a thin shadow of the boy who had shouted "Death and Victory!" that day in the snowstorm. His eyes seemed to have burnt up the rest of his face. He looked very small and eager and childish.

"You have a Strad! a real Strad!" he said, as he saw Jerningham. "Imagine having a real Strad! Let me see it."

"It is a very valuable instrument. I never let children handle it," Jerningham said.

"You don't call me a child, do you?" Sonnie laughed. "Don't be afraid; I know how to hold a violin."

Jerningham noticed that the hand he held out was shaking, and he grudgingly gave up the violin. He was reassured at the reverence with which Sonnie took it. His very look was a caress.

At last the boy returned it, and fell back on his cushions. "If that Strad was mine, I'd never want anything else all my life," he sighed. "Play something, will you?"

Jerningham did not like the tone, but Sonnie's eyes could not be denied. With an infinite con-

The Valley of the Great Shadow

descension he leisurely played a few bars. Sonnie's face reminded him that his listener was fastidious, and he executed a difficult movement; but the boy's face remained blank. Jerningham heard his disappointed sigh.

"Poor little chap! it's beyond him," he thought; "I'll try something simpler." But though he went from study to study, Sonnie remained silent and unimpressed.

At last, piqued, Jerningham put out all his power in an intricate Brahms, then laid down his bow. Sonnie struggled to his feet and took up the violin. "Let me try."

An uncertain note answered his uncertain touch. Vexed, Jerningham walked to the window.

Sonnie stood rapt, as if listening to something that no other listener could hear.

A moment after Jerningham swung round. Sonnie's bow was sweeping the strings. A wild, unearthly melody sounded. It filled the room with the tramp of a mighty army.

Jerningham stood, his eyes fastened on Sonnie, holding his breath, not daring to move lest he should miss one footfall of the procession. He could almost see the long line of mysterious forms tramping to the music. Suddenly a string broke.

Sonnie turned his pale face to him, handed him the violin, and fell weeping on the sofa.

Mr. Jerningham

Jerningham did not speak. He was not concerned for the boy. He stood biting his lips, wondering what quality it was in Sonnie's music that his own lacked.

That evening he did not sit silent at dinner. Miss Baker was quite ready to talk to him about Sonnie, and some of the other people were curious to hear about his proposed expedition into the valley to see the Todten-Volk.

Soon after eleven he went into the hall to meet Simplicity. She and her friend, Mrs. Royston, were there waiting for him. Mrs. Royston was a young wife who lived in a *châlet* at Pitzen, Simplicity told him. Both women were excited. Mrs. Royston giggled foolishly.

"You mustn't tell my husband of this escapade," she said. "He would not have let me come if he had known of it. I told him Frau Bullen had asked me to spend the night at the Royal. It is true, you know."

"I hope you won't do yourself any harm," said Simplicity, sobering, and glancing anxiously at Mrs. Royston.

"Don't be afraid, my dear child; I shall do much more harm if I stay at home brooding over the future. I have a perfect horror of death. I want to know if—"

"But suppose we do see the dead folk?" said Simplicity.

"We shan't see anything if we waste any more

The Valley of the Great Shadow

time, that's certain. Come along," Mrs. Royston cried.

Jerningham followed them into the road. The electric light still flared outside the hotel, throwing shadows on the snow. The hotel was asleep. A deathly silence held the valley, but for the deep voice of the Grünwasser. "We shall have to cross the river," Simplicity whispered. It seemed difficult to speak naturally in the silence.

The night was black with clouds. Not a star twinkled. A thick mist swathed the valley. It clung like a chilly sheet to their faces.

"Do you think it is wise to go?" Jerningham asked.

"Yes, yes!" Mrs. Royston said. "It is not far. We cross the river, and go to a ravine a little way up the valley."

"We ought not to talk," said Simplicity.

She led the way, following the beaten snow of the path. Her snowshoes made no sound; she went, a dim and noiseless figure, through the mist and the midnight. Mrs. Royston followed close behind, noiseless, too. Jerningham, making the third of the file, felt the mystery of the mute, dark figures passing silently through the black night. He wondered why he had come. The snow and the mist and the silence were gruesome. If it had been possible, he would have turned back and left the women to go on

Mr. Jerningham

alone. There was something uncanny in the breathlessness of Mrs. Royston's swift, stealthy movements. Simplicity was the only one of the three who walked naturally. The free poise of her head lent Jerningham courage. He fixed his eyes on her, and sought to get away from the consciousness of tension in Mrs. Royston's attitude.

They had passed the last *châlet*; the *Grünwasser* moaned behind them. They were close to the pines that sloped up *Pitz Jakob* and laid a belt of deeper night round the midnight. The silence deepened as the valley narrowed and the mist closed round the three shadows. It wound them round and round until even consciousness was bound in damp bands. The chill lay on Jerningham's thoughts. He had expected to see other people in the valley—the peasants, or visitors curious like themselves to see the procession of the dead folk; but not a voice echoed, not another living form was visible. Simplicity led the way in a silence that every minute became more ghastly. It seemed to the man that they had been walking forever in mute procession through the great shadow of the night. He could not remember the time when he had not taken those soundless steps over the livid snow, feeling the ravine closing in upon him, struggling in the slimy bands of the mist.

"Stop!" said Simplicity, in a hoarse whisper.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

Her voice seemed to have arrested even life. The three stood frozen. The deep stroke of midnight came down the valley. Twelve beat out loud and clamorous, then twelve again, dying faintly. The air trembled round Mrs. Royston's shudder.

As the strokes died, another sound woke in Jerningham's mind—the first note of the music Sonnie had played that day. One by one the notes came, muffled, like a dim, veiled procession passing by. They sounded louder as they drew near, and Jerningham's eyes froze with terror. Every note was a ghost, growing larger and larger; every ghost wore a human shape, cloaked and cowed. A gleam of snow lighted the feet.

"The Todten-Volk!" dropped from Jerningham's dry lips.

One by one they passed him, swathed in mist and midnight, stepping to the tramp of wizard music

His gaze could not move away from the wan procession. The faces were hidden, the heads bowed.

As the last ghost passed, Jerningham staggered back. Sonnie's face had turned to him. It gleamed dimly from a lifted cowl.

Mrs. Royston's shrieks sounded far away, then nearer and louder, until Jerningham heard the whole valley crying out.

Mr. Jerningham

"For God's sake!" His voice stumbled and fell.

"Be quiet, Mrs. Royston; please be quiet," Simplicity was saying. "You will hurt yourself. There is nothing! Don't you see? Twelve o'clock has struck, and not a single ghost has passed."

She had thrown her arms round Mrs. Royston, and now she shook her gently. "Be quiet, you mad woman. I'm real sorry you ever persuaded me to come with you."

"But I saw! but I saw!" Mrs. Royston screamed.

Jerningham put his hand on her shoulder, in a quieting pressure. "What did you see?" he said, in a muffled voice.

"A long line of figures," she gasped, "wrapped in white."

"Bunkum!" said Simplicity, vigorously. "I stared as hard as I could, and I saw nothing but mist. Come away; time we were going back."

"No! no!" Mrs. Royston gasped. "I saw the face of the last, and—and it was my husband's. I saw him quite plainly. He had a—a baby in his arms. His hair was wet and dripping."

"Goodness! If there's a healthy creature in this valley, it's Mr. Royston. He isn't going to die this year. Come along, Mrs. Royston; at any rate, you are safe."

The Valley of the Great Shadow

"What does it all mean?" said Jerningham, in a queer voice.

"It's all superstition," said Simplicity. "The peasants say that when the Todten-Volk go by you see the face of the last man only, and it is the face of a living man who will die during the year. But I'm real disappointed there was nothing to see. Now then, quick march back again!"

They set out at a sharp pace, Simplicity talking loudly all the time. When she saw that neither of the others would talk, she began to sing.

The night waked; her voice, sweet and strong, clove the mist and soared through the great shadows. Where the clouds parted a star shone.

The next day Jerningham spent an hour with Sonnie. He had taken his violin to play for the boy, but he was the listener while Sonnie played. There was something in Sonnie's music that showed his own art crude and lifeless, and made him recognise his limitations. It also kept alive in his mind his midnight experience. He could not look at Sonnie without seeing the last face in the procession of the Todten-Volk; and while he was not superstitious, he could not get away from the thought that the boy was doomed. The pity of it seized him. For the first time in his life Jerningham found his interest centred

Mr. Jerningham

in something outside himself. When it was necessary once to sit up with Sonnie, he begged to be allowed to do it. That night's watch made him Sonnie's friend.

After that Jerningham was always in Sonnie's room. The boy could not bear to see the Strad go; and when Jerningham was not playing himself, he lent the violin to Sonnie, and sat listening to him. Jerningham found a whimsical pleasure in playing second fiddle to the boy. He had recognised Sonnie's genius. In a fortnight the man had changed. His air had become less weary; there was a spark in his eye. He had lost some of his affectations. The violets were given every day to Sonnie. He forgot to read poetry at table. There were always inquiries for Sonnie to be answered. Simplicity, who was very friendly, laughed at his long hair. He came back from the hairdresser cropped and in his right mind.

"There is nothing wrong with you," Dr. Engel said to him. "Go back to your work."

Jerningham shook his head. "If I go away, my violin goes, too, and that would break Sonnie's heart."

"Then leave him the violin."

"Give it him altogether! You don't know what you are saying. One doesn't give a Strad to a boy!"

"Ah, to be sure! The genius is only a boy."

The Valley of the Great Shadow

"It's the only instrument I can use. You might as well tell me to give up my art altogether. If I gave away my Strad, the only thing left to me would be to conduct an orchestra."

"No," Engel said, drily; "you might conduct an omnibus."

Jerningham went off in a rage. Fortunately, he was master of his time. He would not go away till Sonnie was stronger and better able to console himself for the loss of the Strad. Suddenly the memory of the procession of the dead folk returned to him. He shook it off. There was nothing in it; the fancy of excited nerves. Besides, Sonnie would get well again. He was one of the procession of people passing through the valley from death to life. One of these days the pathetic hopefulness would shine in his eyes; he would go out and take his place in the procession and march gaily with the best—from death to life.

But Jerningham could not persuade himself that Sonnie's place was not last in the procession. Nothing ever banished the shadow in the boy's eyes but the violin.

And Sonnie had once said if the Strad were his, he would want nothing else in life.

He took the violin and went to No. 10.

Sonnie was too weak to sit up. He lay back on his pillows, looking very white.

"He is not so well," said his aunt. "He

Mr. Jerningham

fainted this morning, but I think it is only the *föhn* wind; it always tires him." She looked anxiously at Sonnie.

Jerningham's eyes followed hers to the boy's face.

Sonnie was like a wreath of snow that the *föhn* would snatch away from the valley. The sun shone on the windows, but a new shadow had fallen on the boy's eyes.

"You look so tired," said Jerningham; "I won't stay now. To-morrow I will stay longer, to make up."

"To-morrow is my birthday," Sonnie smiled. "You will lend me the Strad all day."

Jerningham carried away the violin with a guilty consciousness that it was Sonnie's by right.

The boy's face haunted him. It looked out from the pillow as that other face looked at him from the cowl. If he could only make up his mind to give the violin to Sonnie!

Sonnie's eyes followed the violin as Jerningham disappeared. He could see it go and not regret it. There seemed so little to wish for in life. He only wanted to lie still and watch the sunset creeping up the bed. When the bar of light touched the head of the bed the sun would sink.

He thought dreamily of the sunlighted valley—the great sweep of the golden waves that flooded

The Valley of the Great Shadow

the snow and ebbed and flowed among the mountains. It was very beautiful.

He had grown to love the valley. He would be content to remain in it now; to listen always, as he had listened on the day of the snowstorm, to the grand chords of the chorale that echoed here among the hills: "Oh, Life, here is thy victory!"

Yes, the victory of Life was here in the valley where Death had lost his sting, where one might look on his face and not be afraid, where one might walk through the shadow and fear no evil.

He smiled, remembering how he had shouted "Death and Victory!" the day he had carried Miss Busybody. If he had had any voice left now for a shout, it would be "Life and Victory!"

"I'll tell her that when she comes," he said to himself. He turned his head feebly. How heavy it had become!

"Aunt, I want to see Miss Busybody."

"I think not, dear. You look so tired."

"No, I'm better—quite well. You go and rest. Let her stay with me."

"I don't like to leave you, Sonnie." .

"Yes, please. I will ring—when I want you."

Miss Busybody came tiptoeing in, her hands behind her, her face full of mystery.

"Miss Baker says I'm to send you to sleep, and then call her. Guess what I've got here."

"I can't; I'm sleepy."

Mr. Jerningham

"It's a secret; it's laurels. But you're not to know till to-morrow. Philippa and me bought it for your birthday. She said flowers; but I 'membered you said you wanted laurels, so we got a wreath. Do you think you'll like it? Shall I see if it fits?"

She climbed on the bed and crowned him with the laurel wreath. He shivered, feeling the cold of the leaves.

"It's beautiful," he whispered. That strange faintness was coming on again.

"Yes; it fits you boofully. I'll let you wear it a bit, if you don't tell Philippa I showed it you too soon."

"I won't tell."

The cold of the leaves seemed to have touched every part of his body; or was it the chill of sunset coming on? What had happened to him?

"A string broke then," he muttered. He felt himself falling, and he clutched at the clothes to save himself. What had happened? Miss Busybody, sitting beside him, seemed to be drifting away. He could not breathe for Fifine's loud purring. He roused himself.

"Don't go—don't go—"

"I'm not going," said Miss Busybody, settling herself on a chair with Fifine on her lap. "I'll wait till you're asleep. You're velly sleepy, aren't you, Sonnie?"

"Yes, but I wanted—to tell you—" What

The Valley of the Great Shadow

was it he had to tell Miss Busybody? "To tell you—Victory—Life—"

His thoughts were drifting by. He caught at them, but they drifted through his fingers.

"Is that my bow on the bed?" He tried to catch the bar of sunlight on the bed, but it slipped through his hand. "I thought I had the Strad—too dark to see—"

"It's not dark, Sonnie; it's velly light. Are you afraid of the dark?"

"Not afraid," he muttered, drowsily.

"I am." Miss Busybody nodded her head wisely. "And then I always say my darkness hymn, the one with 'Grant to little children visions bright of Thee,' and 'Let Thy holy angels watch around my bed.'"

"Say it," Sonnie whispered.

"What makes you talk so low, Sonnie? It's too soon to say the darkness hymn."

She looked at him and sighed. His eyes were closed.

"He's not velly amusing. I wish Boykin was here. I'll say my hymn now, shall I, Sonnie?"

Sonnie opened his eyes again and smiled. His hands were moving in the sunlight.

"Don't play with your fingers, naughty Sonnie. You're to go to sleep. Shut your eyes; I'm afraid when you look at me like that."

Sonnie smiled still. The bar of light climbed his chest out of reach of the restless fingers.

Mr. Jerningham

He folded his hands and gave a long, gentle sigh.

Miss Busybody put Fifine down on the bed, and sat looking at Sonnie with a troubled face. "I wish he'd shut his eyes and his mouth," she said, plaintively. "It's drefful quiet. I wish I needn't stay till he's asleep. I wish he'd talk. It's drefful lonely. I'd better say my darkness hymn."

"'Now the day is over,' " she began. She stopped. "Hush!" She put her finger on her lips as Jerningham came in softly.

"I'm velly glad that somebody's come," she whispered, scrambling down from the high chair. "Sonnie won't speak, and he won't go to sleep."

Jerningham went to the bed, and stood gazing down at the smiling lips, the glazed eyes. The bar of sunset lay across the laurel leaves. The kitten purred on comfortably.

"What is Sonnie looking at?" Miss Busybody pulled Jerningham's sleeve.

He raised his head, laid down the Strad beside Sonnie, lifted the child, and went from the room.

CHAPTER IX

SIMPLICITY

Fifine's purr got on Jerningham's nerves. He held the kitten under his coat. Fifine purred on happily; she was used to Jerningham. That purr was ironic! Jerningham made a sudden movement to put her down. He changed his mind, and drew the coat closer round her. It was not her fault that she lived while Sonnie died.

His face was gaunt. There was something in his eyes that the people in the hotel were shy of looking at. It had been there since yesterday at sunset. And now it was sunset again. Jerningham caught his breath with a hard sob. He had just brought the kitten from Sonnie's empty room.

Well, it was all over now. Nothing was left but to go back to England. His art was over, too. It would be desecration for him to use Sonnie's Strad; and he would never play again. How could he touch the strings that guarded the music of the boy's dead fingers? The violin was on the coffin, in the mortuary chapel. His eyes dragged themselves across the valley to the pine

Simplicity

wood, where there was a gleam of white walls. His lips tightened. The path that led to the wood was as lonely as the sunset. All at once his fingers closed round Ffine. He lifted himself. The violin? Was that the violin? Then he dropped back. "Fool," he muttered.

Along the valley came the ring of the jodel. The sound trailed away into silence, on which a woman's voice drifted along:

"Under the winter, dear,
Summer's note lieth;
If it be sweet to hear
Song never dieth."

The woman swung round the bend of the path, and was full in sight, a point of red on the snow.

"Under the winter, dear,"
Summer's note lieth."

It was Simplicity. If the red gown had not proclaimed her, he would still have known her voice. But how could she sing like that, when Sonnie—? It was not four hours since her weeping had gone to his heart. They had held each other's hand and looked at Sonnie in silence. Then they had turned from the dead to the living, and their eyes had struggled together. He was so weak, and he needed to hear a voice in that awful silence.

Simplicity had spoken. "Not here—not now." Yet she could sing like that four hours after!

The Valley of the Great Shadow

He watched the red gown growing larger. It was like the red of sunset. Her singing grew louder.

“Soon in the forest, love,
Breezes shall bear it;
There in the bough above,
Lo! thou shalt hear it!”

Two men, new arrivals, strolled on to the balcony.

“That girl is the only lively thing in this God-forsaken hole!” one of them said. “Lord! what a country! Looks as if we should have more snow, too; then good-bye to our skating. What are you grinning at, Romsey?”

“Nothing; only it’s pleasant to hear my verses sung in red and white so far from England.”

“Oh, confound it all! Can’t you forget your trade? But the girl can sing.”

Romsey stroked his moustache. His eyes waited for Simplicity. Jerningham lifted his haggard face and glared at them. This was the sort of person that harried the place. But what did it matter? As soon as the funeral was over he would go back to London, to live his life again as if he had never known Sonnie. But could he do that? Would he ever again be satisfied with the things that had satisfied him before he had known the boy?

He leaned over the balcony rail and wondered if his life would be more grey than it had been

Simplicity

before it had had that point of red in it. She had a large nature; he could not watch her every day without admiring its generous lines. She had given friendship lavishly, but her breadth meant shallowness. There had been no depth in her grief for Sonnie.

She was quite near, on the path under the balcony, and she smiled up at him, showing her strong, white teeth.

"I am coming to you; wait for me."

The minute after she was on the balcony, rosy and smiling. Jerningham saw her gaiety with dull eyes that avoided hers, but Romsey smiled delightedly.

Simplicity drew up in her rapid walk towards Jerningham. "What's the matter with you? Come and take a walk."

"I prefer to sit still."

She studied his face. "What have you been doing all the afternoon?"

"Nothing."

"Nursing kittens. Call that a man's work?" But she liked him better for taking notice of Sonnie's kitten.

He made no answer. A little tender smile came into her eyes, and died before it saw the light.

"You would have done better to mourn some other way," she said.

"I'm not like you; I can't forget," he said.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

He rose wearily, and was passing her. Simplicity gazed at him as if she did not understand.

"Why, you wouldn't have that poor boy give up his heaven, would you?" she cried, her eyes widening. "Hasn't he done the noblest thing he could do, even if he had lived a hundred years? I'm just delighted that he has got over his rough bit of road so quickly. I guess he's harping with the sweetest harp in heaven, and all the angels round him listening."

"That sort of thing may satisfy you," said Jerningham; "I don't believe in dreams."

"Dreams make the life," she said, flushing, "and dreams make the death. Sonnie wouldn't smile like that if he hadn't dreamt in life. He looks real noble; I've been in the mortuary an hour sitting with him. And I said to myself, 'It is good to be here.'"

Jerningham turned abruptly and left the girl. She stared after him, and one by one the lights in her face went out, leaving a wan twilight. It settled oddly on the strong lines of her face. Her heel struck the balcony floor crisply as she moved away.

"I wasn't dreaming, I know that," she said. "But even if I had been dreaming, the dream makes the life. Well, I don't understand him, that's clear; and it's very little comfort to know that he's miles away from understanding me. Life is a real hard nut to crack. Sonnie has

Simplicity

cracked his nut, and I don't believe it was empty."

Everybody was watching the sudden friendship between Simplicity and Romsey. It was diverting to see the ball of life tossing between two people; the movement broke up the monotony of the hotel. Everything had been dull lately. Babette was well again, and was preparing for her wedding. The Professor and Miss Blake quarrelled more intimately than before, and looked the happier for it. Mrs. Royston's baby had found its way safely into the valley. Dr. Engel went about looking like a frost-bitten branch. There was no scandal to flavour the season. The days went yawning through the twenty-four hours.

Simplicity was the only person who looked brisk and busy, and not bored. She never seemed to have an idle minute. When she was not skating, sleighing, tobogganing, walking with Romsey, she was singing his songs to music of her own setting. Romsey was a popular ballad-writer. He stayed on in the Mittenthal after his friend had left. He and Simplicity were working together. He supplied the song, she the music. One day she asked Jerningham to bring his violin and accompany her on the piano.

"Hasn't Romsey accompanied you sufficiently?" he asked.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

The glance she flung at him reminded him that she had once called him "a little woman-insect." He shrivelled before her.

"I don't wonder that you can make such a speech," she said, scornfully. "When a man spends his days loafing about with a face as long as a fiddle, he ain't likely to be the manlier for it."

"I didn't think you concerned yourself with my doings."

"I don't; but I concern myself with what you don't do. Do you suppose you'll have eternity to promenade in, when you don't take the trouble to mark life on the six feet of earth time gives you?"

"I wonder what you mean by that?"

"Why don't you take your violin and do your honest work honestly?"

"I am no artist. You said so yourself."

"But you have technique, and you only need passion to be a great player. If you felt things, the feeling would grow in your music."

He shook his head. "I should only fail. I don't choose to be a magnificent failure."

She lifted her eyes impatiently. "It would be a higher thing, at any rate, than crawling through life on your stomach. Don't you see that you are losing your limbs by not using them? You crawl when you might fly—when you might be another Sonnie."

Simplicity

The storm in her voice shook Jerningham.

"Sonnie had wings," he said, hoarsely.

"So has the chrysalis; only it must spread them."

"The chrysalis waits for the sun."

"You sit with your back to the light." She swung round and left him.

He looked after her, until the wistfulness in his eyes grew bold and showed itself openly.

Was he sitting with his back to the light? Was she all that he had once believed her to be—true and deep and great-hearted?

His eyes clung about her as if they would have dragged her back to him. Then their hold loosened.

"Mr. Romsey," Simplicity was calling, "don't you want to hear me play your new song?"

A bitter smile twisted Jerningham's lips. "She's only a heartless flirt—a worthless, shallow girl. And I stay on here, wasting my life for her. I will go; I won't stay a single day longer."

He leaned back in his chair with closed eyes. Pain twined itself among the lines of his face.

Two little feet pattered past him, returned, and stopped beside him. He looked up, and saw Miss Busybody gazing at him with soft, troubled eyes.

"I'm 'fraid your head's bad. Shall I kiss away the pain?"

The Valley of the Great Shadow

"The pain won't be kissed away," he said.

Miss Busybody sighed. "It's drefful tiresome not to do anything. Simplicity said I could toboggan with her, but she won't go. She's crying in her room, and she says her head's bad. I'm drefful lonely. Boykin's gone away, and I want Sonnie."

Jerningham lifted the child on his knee, and wrapped his cloak round her. She nestled to him, warm and confiding. "I like talking," she said. "You're a nice man to talk to. Tell me why you put your violin on Sonnie's coffin."

"I gave it him because he wanted it."

"But he didn't want it; Marie said he didn't. God has put him in the German band in heaven. I expect he has the boofullest harp. Will you take the violin back?"

"No," said Jerningham; "I don't know how to play it."

"I know how Sonnie played it." She lifted her head and looked at him knowingly. "He told me once. He listened to what the stars told him, and the snow, and the trees, and the wind, and then he put it into music. Sometimes it hurt him drefful; but the more it hurt him, the more he liked to play. And he could see things—great, big, beautiful things—better than angels. But Marie said they were only common people, like Philippa and Simplicity."

Simplicity

"Do you like Simplicity?" Jerningham asked. He hated himself for asking.

Miss Busybody nodded. "Yes, and my Uncle Rob just adores her; he says so. He has to die soon, but he says he doesn't mind. And Simplicity is going to hold his hand, and shout 'Death and Victory!' all the time till he is dead. I think he wants me now; I think I had better go and see."

She scrambled down, and lifted her mouth up to Jerningham for a kiss. "Will you take me tobogganing to-morrow?" she asked.

"I'm afraid not. I'm going away to-morrow."

Miss Busybody's eyes brimmed up. "I wish you wouldn't!" she cried. "It's drefful lonely. Everybody is going away, Boykin and Sonnie. And Simplicity won't play with me, and my Uncle Rob will soon be dead. And there won't be anybody left. And Miss Baker has gone, and taken away Fifine; and Sonnie won't come back. I think God might have remembered that I'm a velly lonely little girl without Sonnie."

"Don't cry," said Jerningham, stroking her little fat hand. "Don't cry; I won't go away to-morrow. I'll stay and play with you."

"And Simplicity?" Miss Busybody brightened. "Will you play with Simplicity, too?"

"Simplicity has other people to play with, Miss Busybody."

The Valley of the Great Shadow

That was a fortnight ago, and Simplicity had scarcely spoken to him since. His weary droop had come back; he read at meals, and took no notice of any one but Miss Busybody. She was his little friend; he let her sit on his knee and chatter to him of Simplicity. He could not believe that the girl was a heartless flirt when he heard of her tenderness to Major Sanderson and the child.

He said no more about leaving. He knew that while Simplicity remained he would remain, too. But she did not speak to him, and his days were very lonely. She was not altogether to blame for her silence towards him. He avoided her himself, but she did not seem to notice that he did so. She was always in high spirits, boisterous even to grotesqueness. Her gaiety swung like a brilliant Japanese lantern above the dusk of pain, and the shadows fled. Every morning her laugh flew along with her toboggan where the red and blue flags marked the course of the ice-run. Jerningham, hidden among the pines above the run, followed the laugh and the flash of the red gown, and the loneliness at his heart tightened. He was very lonely without his music, without Sonnie, without the dream that he had dreamed. He was terribly lonely. There was a crook in his fate. Romsey had arrived in the hotel the very day that Love had stood like an angel of life at the bed of the dead

Simplicity

boy. He went over the scene again, and lived through the hours that followed. He had sat on the balcony till the sun had set and the silence had ripped open the grave in his heart. At sunset Sonnie had always played, and that day the stillness had touched notes deeper than sound. The notes had been so deep he had felt, not heard them. The snow had grown leaden round him, like life. And suddenly the twilight had blazed with scarlet, and her voice had flaunted along the valley:

"Under the winter, dear,
Summer's note lieth;
If it be sweet to hear,
Song never dieth."

They had been Romsey's words, and Romsey had heard them. Well, the song had not been for him.

One morning spring came to the Mittenthal. A sea of sunlight tossed its waves among the hills. The snow in the valley was still to swooning. The sword of the sun had struck its heart. Down on the road a thin tinkle of cowbells lingered along the line of the lingering cows. In the pine wood there was a measured thud—thud. The snow-wreaths were slipping onto the roof of the mortuary chapel, wreath to wreath, ice to ice, snow to snow.

In the hotels the steps of the waiters had

The Valley of the Great Shadow

quickened. On the balconies the faces of the invalids had become alert. Life was among them, tossing her balls from hand to hand. Major Sanderson had not even strength to open his palm as she passed him.

The restlessness in the air seized Jerningham. The time would soon come when he must go away, beggared of ambition and the few grudging gifts that hope had given.

If he had had his music still. But it would never satisfy him again. Sonnie had made him see the futility of it; his art was cold and dead. Simplicity's eyes accused him of crawling through life. Well, he would crawl back to the big, pitiless London, that sucked in life's failures and nourished itself with the blood of man's vain aspiring—and yet— Ah, how the prospect stifled him!

He sprang up. He would climb the Brunberg; climb and climb until this beating of baffled wings, this sound of music clamouring, settled again into the toneless peace he had become accustomed to.

It was the spring in his blood that had stirred it. He would climb—get higher and higher, walk until he dropped, until this fluttering motion of life and sound of music dropped, too, and died of its own struggle to live.

The path twisted in and out of the wood, between the ranks of solemn pines that stood to

Simplicity

watch it going by. The snow had been beaten down by feet passing. Now and then the dull thud of falling snow broke the silence. High up the path a peasant went jodelling. The breath of resin charged the air with springtime. The great patience of nature lay white and waiting among the roots. In the top of the pines a light wind sang like the high notes of the violin.

"Sonnie listened to what the wind told him, and he put it into music." Miss Busybody's voice drifted by.

Jerningham climbed up and up, but he could not get away from her voice—from the tumult in his pulses. Strange harmonies strove in him with a beating of baffled wings. His quick, short breaths came gustily in the struggle. The high notes in the pines tingled through and through him. He heard a fine, wavering melody with a measured underbeat in the song of the wind. He stopped, breathless, and leaned against a tree.

Voices were in the wood, winding about him with the winding of the path.

"You dear man! Well, I'm just as happy. But it's impossible—I don't believe—"

Jerningham did not hear the end of the sentence, but the man's reply fell on his ear with the sound and the weight of falling snow.

"Not love you? Who could help loving you? Don't you know how frank and generous and

The Valley of the Great Shadow

womanly you are? I'll not forget the first day I saw you. You came along the valley singing one of my own songs."

Every muscle in Jerningham's body tightened to hear the woman's voice, but the winding of the road caught it away. By and by the deeper voice rang out:

"Of course it's all right. You are going to be very happy with the man you love. How queer all this is. And I thought you were grave because my songs bored you."

Simplicity's laugh sprinkled the wood with gay little echoes. "Your songs? What conceit! Goodness! I concern myself with songs when I was haunted by a silence?"

Jerningham twisted an arm round the tree to keep himself from falling. His blinded eye struck the path below. There was a dash of red behind the lattice of pines.

Late that evening he returned to the hotel. He hoped no one would see him come in, but Simplicity was in the hall, walking restlessly up and down.

He saw her face change, but his own was dead. She ran forward, holding out her hand.

"You look like a sick man! Where have you been all day? Come right into the reading-room; I saw to the fire. Why, you are as numb—"

She drew him into the room, and pushed him into the chair before the fire.

Simplicity

'Now toast yourself well. Where have you been? I declare you frightened us all. We thought of avalanches and ravines.'

"No," he said, huskily; "I was in the wood. I had been dreaming, but I woke—woke in time—"

"Good for you!" she cried, half-sob in her laugh. "Why, you might have been asleep still, frozen to death."

"It is the music in me that is frozen to death."

"Say you so?" She sprang up and gazed at him with flashing eyes. "You are wrong! It appears to me that the music has wakened. You have it in your face—your eyes are so deep. It is Sonnie's own look when he played."

"I shall never play again." His tired voice trailed a shadow across her eyes. "My life is over. I am a defeated man; one of life's failures. Even Love has cast me out."

"Ah, no! not that!" she cried, passionately. "How can you say that, when—when—" She choked, but went on again, an eager intensity in her voice. "A failure? defeated? Why, it's just that which makes the artist. When Sonnie died I had the biggest hopes of you. I said to myself: 'Now he will find his art; now he will feel and make us feel. When the sob is in his heart it will sound in the strings.' But it didn't. I waited till I was sick with waiting to hear that

The Valley of the Great Shadow

violin. Sonnie's death didn't teach you anything. It only dried up your manliness."

"It taught me a hard lesson," he said, dully. "Don't let me forget that I have learned it."

He rose unsteadily and held out his hand. Pain had bleached his smile. "Good-night, and good-bye; I start for England to-morrow."

He dropped her hand and turned away without looking at her. Then he paused, hesitating.

"My dear," he said, brokenly, "I hope you will be very happy with the man you love."

Simplicity was staring at him with colourless lips parted. Her eyes looked like cages in which the singing-birds had dropped, wounded. At his words the colour rushed back to her face, the birds fluttered up again to their perch. She laughed, a curious, shattered laugh.

"Why, if this isn't the funniest thing I ever heard," she began. The words broke off. She dashed past him out of the room.

Jerningham packed, his face grown stern.

"I didn't think she was quite so heartless," he said to himself. But when he put the violin-case with his Gladstones, her words came back to him:

"When the sob is in the heart, it will sound in the strings. Defeat and failure make the artist."

"If that is true, I should be an artist," he said. "But I am no artist. I will never play again."

Simplicity

"I grew sick of waiting to hear that violin." Well, she would never hear it again.

He took the Strad out of the case and gazed at it. He could almost see Sonnie's face bending over it; he could almost hear the music the boy had played—a fine, wavering melody, with a measured underbeat in it. The music must be in the strings yet. They had not been touched since they touched Sonnie's coffin.

He struggled with the impulse to play. It fought with his will. He felt the beat of baffled wings.

At last he straightened himself. "Once again," he said; "I will play this once. I will lay the music on the face of the dead."

He took the violin downstairs, and went onto the balcony. No one was there. The lights were out. The mist was heavy on the valley. He seemed to be following Simplicity's soundless feet across the snow. The night was full of the tramp of feet stepping to a fine, wavering melody. It was Sonnie playing again! It was Sonnie playing again!

With a sob, half-agony, half-delight, Jerningham swept the bow across the strings, and the music leaped forth.

He played on and on, to the tramp of that procession of the dead—ambition, pride, the lust of life, the desire of the eye. Cowled and hooded they passed him. He played on and on,

The Valley of the Great Shadow

the notes sweeping upward, deepening, flooding, till the whole valley heard the tramp of passing feet.

As the last faint note was folded in mist Jerningham sank down trembling. He could still hear the feet passing. But it was the tap of Simplicity's heels on the balcony floor.

She kneeled down beside him, and laid her face on his hand. He knew by her tears that she was weeping.

"I heard you playing; I stood and listened till I couldn't keep my senses. It seemed to me that I was letting my life go past me. I saw the dead folk while you played. And the last turned and looked at me, and I saw Love going by to join the dead."

She sobbed comfortlessly a moment, then lifted her head with a sudden passion.

"And I'm not going to be such a fool as to let Love pass me and die for the want of a word. It's all miserable, heartless convention that keeps a woman silent when Love is passing her for the want of a word. Oh, you genius, my genius!" Her voice was tender and soft and infinitely womanly. "Don't you know when a woman loves you?"

"What is this? What?" Jerningham faltered. "I thought it was Romsey. Isn't Romsey the man you love?"

"Romsey? Why, Romsey's engaged to my

Simplicity

best friend. That's how I came to know his songs. Besides, he knew all the time I loved you. Why, do you think I'd have kept up all these weeks if that dear creature hadn't helped me? And now? Oh, my dear man! You shan't go away if I can keep you. I want you. I want to be very happy with the man I love."

"I think—I am dreaming—I must be dreaming," Jerningham stammered.

"We are such stuff as dreams are made of," Simplicity said. The words were a fine, wavering melody with an underbeat in them.

CHAPTER X

MARIE

Boykin lived with his mother in a *châlet* at Pitzen, and every day there were words between Miss Busybody and her nurse, Marie, as to the road they should take. Miss Busybody liked nature and Pitzen; Marie preferred Mittenplatz and the chance of seeing Dr. Engel's coachman, Jakob Meyer.

"I'm going to Pitzen." Miss Busybody planted her snow-shoes firmly one day. "There is pines and *châlets* at Pitzen."

"Ach! but the shops at Mittenplatz!" Marie said, in German.

"I hate shops, Marie. And I don't want to talk to Jakob Meyer. He's not velly amusing. He only says "*Ja wohl*."

"But the Herr Doctor, *liebchen*," Marie coaxed. "The Doctor that thou lovest, whose pockets hold gifts for thee. Ach! how pleasant to meet him!" And Marie spread out her arms rapturously.

Miss Busybody looked fixedly towards Pitzen.

"Ach, Gott! the obstinate!" Marie sighed.

Marie

But she must see Jakob that morning before Berta, Boykin's nurse, came into town.

"Look, sweet one," she said; "we will go to the wonderful hen that lays the sugar eggs. And who can tell? I may find twenty centimes for thee."

Miss Busybody brightened. Two sly little devils came into her eyes and stayed there. She turned slowly towards Mittenplatz.

"Give me the centimes first."

"Ach, the cunning rogue!" Marie searched her pockets.

"Here, then. Now hasten, for we are late."

She dragged Miss Busybody along the road, her eyes darting from side to side in search of the Doctor's sleigh.

And there it was, before the Kurhaus! Ach! if the Herr Doctor should come out and drive away before she could speak to Jakob!

She pressed on, Miss Busybody trotting willingly to match her pace. Heaven was kind. The sleigh was yet at the door; Jakob still crouched in his fur cape on the box. He looked cold. Marie's rosy smiles might have warmed him, but he remained chilly while she poured out a torrent of persuasive German. As she finished, the Doctor's voice was heard speaking sharply in the Kurhaus.

"Ja wohl!" Jakob said, hastily, and gathered up the reins and straightened himself.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

Marie dragged Miss Busybody across the road, and stood gazing pensively at the Kurhaus gardens.

"Good morning, Miss Busybody," Engel called, and kissed his hand to the child as he hurried into the sleigh. Miss Busybody turned, smiled shyly, and hung behind Marie's skirts.

"Catch!" said Engel, and threw a little parcel at her as he passed.

"Chocolates!" Miss Busybody beamed, with her mouth full. By and by she looked up at Marie.

"I know what the Procession of the Betrothed is, Marie. Karl and Babette are going to drive in it, too. Dr. Engel has lent them his sleigh. Are you going to drive with Jakob in the Procession der Verlobten, Marie?"

"I don't speak of Jakob," said Marie, growing very red. "On Sunday there is the procession of the children, when those who love drive out on their toboggans with garlands and great gladness."

"But don't you love Jakob, Marie? Boykin says Berta loves him. She wants to be betrothed to him, like Karl and Babette. And you told Jakob you would go in the Procession of the Betrothed; you know you did, Marie."

"Ach was!" Marie sighed. "See, kindchen, don't speak of this; and if thou art silent, thou shalt see the procession of the children. On Sunday the boys take the little maidens of their

Marie

hearts to Bergstein to keep *fest*. The toboggans are decked with pine and roses. It is wunder-schön."

Miss Busybody pranced in the snow. "Yes, yes! I want to see them. We'll all go—Boykin and me, and Karl and Babette, and you and Jakob Meyer—eh, Marie? Shall we all go?"

Marie lifted her eyes in despair. "The child betrays all. And Berta will hear of it, and will persuade Jakob, and they will betroth themselves. Dear little one—" She took Miss Busybody's hand and pressed it earnestly. "If thou speakest of this, thou canst not go. It is a tremendous secret for the little peasants of the Alps; but if thou art silent, thou shalt see the procession of the children. Givest thou the faithful promise?"

"I promise," said Miss Busybody, gravely. "I promise velly faithfully—only perhaps Fifine, and perhaps Boykin. And I won't tell Berta, either. Here's the hen. Come, Marie, come."

She trotted up to the automatic hen that sat in the road on a wooden pedestal. Standing on tiptoe, she could drop her money into its mouth. The hen swallowed the twenty centimes, Marie pulled out a spring, a big white egg fell into the net.

Miss Busybody stood, all eyes and delight, while Marie opened the egg and read the motto inside.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

"Sweetheart mine, come fly with me;
Feast is spread for me and thee;
Crowned with garlands bright of flowers,
We shall sport through sunny hours."

"Ach, it is heavenly—the joy of those who love!" Marie sighed. "But thou hast eaten chocolates; thou mayest not eat the sweets from the egg."

Miss Busybody said nothing, but her teeth met on the sweets with a determined crunch. She folded the motto and put it back in the egg.

"Miss Busybody! Miss Busybody!"

A little boy in a red cap was running towards them, shouting. It was Boykin. Miss Busybody ran to meet him. She put her arms round him, and kissed him many times. He was a little smaller and younger than she. Boykin wiped off the kisses with the tassel of his cap.

"I met Philippa," he said. "She's velly pretty. Her hair curls better'n yours."

Miss Busybody gazed at him reproachfully. She endured torments from curl-papers because Boykin admired curls.

"I've got chocs and a sugar egg," she said, stoutly. "It's got a motto inside it."

"I don't like chocs." Boykin looked at her boldly as he told the fib. "And you can't read the motto. There isn't a book in the world that Philippa can't read."

Marie

"I can read," she said, eagerly; "yes, I can. I can read the motto—as well as Philippa."

She unrolled the strip of paper, and inspired by the urgency of the situation, read glibly:

"Sweetheart, come out and play,
The little boys and the little girls are gay;
They are gay with flowers and play,
And drive each other in the sleigh."

She looked triumphantly at Boykin. "There! and Philippa's older than me."

"I don't want to read," said Boykin, with dignity. "And Philippa's hair curls."

"I've got a secret," Miss Busybody panted, her chest swelling. "It's a tremendous secret, and I've promised not to tell. The motto means it, and I won't tell you."

"I don't want to know it. I've got a secret with Philippa." Boykin strutted off, a hand in each pocket, his red cap singularly defiant.

"Bo—oy—kin!" The word swelled with tears, but Miss Busybody did not move. Boykin walked on, kicking the snow about with his feet. Marie and Berta, following behind, told each other that he was a very naughty, spoiled child."

"Boy—oy—kin!" Miss Busybody wailed. He took no notice, and she trotted after him, sobbing.

"Boy—kin, I'll never kiss you again."

"Philippa kissed me just now," Boykin said,

The Valley of the Great Shadow

musingly; "one on both cheeks. She's got all her toothes; yours has gaps in them."

"When I'm older I'll have toothes that take out and put in again. Philippa's can't take out," said Miss Busybody with spirit.

"Philippa hasn't got a sugar egg, and she hasn't got chocs," said Boykin, thoughtfully. "I loves you, Miss Busybody."

Miss Busybody suddenly showed all the gaps in her teeth. "And I loves you, Boykin," she smiled. "I'll tell you my secret, and I'll give you all my chocs."

Boykin gravely accepted the chocolate. "You're nicer than Philippa," he said; "and I b'lieve she has a wig. Cook has."

Miss Busybody flung her arms round him and whispered the secret. "I don't care what Marie says; I'll go, too," Boykin said when she had finished.

This was on Thursday. During Friday and Saturday the children were inseparable, and the two nurses were forced to spend most of the day together. This suited Marie, who knew that Berta had fewer opportunities of meeting Jakob. If they saw him in the sleigh, neither spoke to him, and Marie dropped her eyes. She did not wish Berta to suspect that she and Jakob understood each other. Berta's pursuit of Jakob was no secret. It had already made a coolness between him and Marie; but if they could be

Marie

kept apart until Marie had driven in the Procession of the Betrothed with Jakob, there would be nothing more to fear from Berta. Marie dreaded lest Miss Busybody, who was a terrible gossip, should betray her; and she invested the secret with imagination and awe by making a show of mysterious preparations for Sunday. For those two days Miss Busybody and Boykin kept their own secret. It was nothing new to see them together. Miss Busybody's love affair with Boykin had amused everybody. The courtship, the quarrels, the reconcilements of the two were common property.

Miss Busybody had an engagement-ring of Thun china, but it was seldom on her finger, being removed with broken-hearted passion in ever interval between quarrel and reconciliation. Boykin's heart, while anchored to Miss Busybody, tossed between Philippa and Simplicity, and Miss Busybody knew already the tender pains of love. She did not mind much Simplicity's influence over Boykin, but she was herself a victim to Philippa's gaiety and charm, and she did not see how Boykin could resist them.

But for two whole days love had been tranquil. The children were in no danger of forgetting their secret. In every *châlet* in the valley the little peasants were busy preparing for Sunday's *fest*. At each door there was a toboggan of quaint shape, which the boys were making

The Valley of the Great Shadow

ready, polishing the wood, brightening the runners. Boykin and Miss Busybody nudged each other whenever they passed one. Sometimes the chalet door stood open, and they could see the long, low room, raftered with larch, the peat glow reddening the beams, the flames leaping on the polished pine settles round the walls. Sometimes, on the table, their eyes would be caught in a tangle of coloured paper—purple and green and violet and gold—from which the girls were making loops of flowers.

And then Miss Busybody would push nearer to Boykin, and whisper excitedly that she and Marie had made better flowers than those, and that her toboggan, dressed with four yellow flags and beautiful red roses, was all ready for Sunday. And Boykin would draw in his breath valiantly, and set his teeth over the desire to tell the other boys that he was going, too, into the Bergstein valley.

His face had grown serious during these days. It was dreadful to keep a secret from Berta, but he had given Miss Busybody the promise of "a genkilman," and that promise Boykin never broke. Miss Busybody had arranged his plan of conduct. Next Sunday, instead of going to sit with his mother after lunch, he was to slip out of the house and hide himself in the pine wood beyond it. Then when the procession came by he was to run out and jump on Miss Busybody's

Marie

toboggan, and Marie would be obliged to take him with them to Bergstein.

Miss Busybody drilled the plan into his ears whenever they stopped to watch the peasants preparing for Sunday. And the nurses watched the preparations, too, each pretending that processions had no interest for her. But the children's procession was only a forecast of the Procession of the Betrothed that would take place the following Sunday.

All Sunday morning Boykin's brow was grave with surmise. His mother was lunching out, and how was he to escape from Berta? How could he slip away to join the procession if he had to spend the afternoon with her in the nursery? And what would Miss Busybody say if he broke the word of a gentleman?

He had no appetite for his dinner. The tinkle of bells and the piping of flutes added to the confusion in his mind. The little peasants were already gathering before the church at Pitzen, and how was he to escape from Berta?

He looked at her wistfully, but she did not notice him. Her face was furious; her brows met above her nose. He wondered if she was in a temper because she was not going with Marie to Bergstein. But he knew better than to ask questions when Berta was in a temper.

She finished her dinner quickly. Then she took him to the nursery, and gave him his

The Valley of the Great Shadow

Noah's ark. She arranged in couples Noah and his wife, and Shem and Ham and Japhet, with their wives, and telling Boykin to set all the animals in pairs, and not to move till she came back, she left him.

A minute after Boykin heard the street door slam. He ran to the window and stared with big eyes. That was certainly Berta slipping along the road to Mittenplatz. He stood looking after her, his face puckered up to cry; but all at once it occurred to him that now he could run away. He turned back into the room, and the silence and loneliness deterred him. The flutes piped along the road, and the bells tinkled; but now there was fear in the sounds, and his face became graver.

"It's drefful hard to run away when there's nobody to run away from," he sighed.

But he had given the word of a gentleman. He found his snow-shoes, and put them on very slowly; he had never dressed himself before, and his gaiters proved too much for him. So also did his overcoat, which refused to meet his arms. At last, after manful struggles, he got both arms into the sleeves. By this time the coat was turned inside out, and the plaid lining worn outside made Boykin look like a Swiss boy. He caught up his cap, walked soberly out of the house, and past the children gathered before the church. The flutes and garlands and gay

Marie

toboggans heartened him. As soon as he was out of sight he ran till he reached the pine wood. Then he crouched down behind a snowdrift and waited for the procession. Meanwhile, Miss Busybody was in her room, waiting for Marie. The last sleigh, the last shrill flute had gone towards Pitzen, and still Marie did not come. Miss Busybody craned from the window. Under the window she could see her toboggan, its decorations shrouded by an old rug. Why didn't Marie come? Everybody had gone, and she would be too late to join the procession. Her eyes filled; she stamped her foot in a passion. And Boykin would wait in the pine wood, and they would not be in the procession, and then he would say she was a girl and not an honourable man. And he would never speak to her again—and he would marry Philippa.

At this point Miss Busybody screamed, "Marie! Marie! Oh, Marie, why don't you come?" But now her voice was muffled by tears. There came in answer a distant tinkle of bells, a jangle of far-away music, the faint shouts of children. She looked out of the window again. Marie was not in sight. A sudden resolution calmed her face and arrested the tears. She turned back into the room, grave and purposeful. It was no use waiting for Marie; she must go alone. She must keep her word to take Boykin to Bergstein. Her red cloak lay ready on

The Valley of the Great Shadow

the bed. She passed it by and put on a black coat.

"Where are you going, Miss Busybody?" said Dr. Engel, who met her on the stairs. He lifted her up and kissed her, and his eyes clouded. She wriggled down from his arms.

"I'm going to Boykin," she answered.

She hurried out of the hotel, and took her toboggan and set out. Every one was at lunch, the road was still deserted; it stretched before her white and gleaming in the sun like polished silver.

She ran along, her toboggan bumping behind her, until she came in sight of the peasants outside the church at Pitzen. Then she slackened pace and walked past them slowly. Her heart was thumping, but her head was lifted with splendid courage. No one spoke to her. At the bend of the road she ran again, and arrived breathless at the pine wood. There she saw the print of Boykin's feet in the snow, and above the drift the peak of a red cap.

"Boys is sillier'n girls," she said. "If Marie had comed, she'd have caught Boykin by his cap. I 'membered to wear my black coat."

She dragged her toboggan round the drift, and came full on Boykin, huddled together in a heap. Relief brightened his face at the sight of Miss Busybody. He was all at once valiant.

"I'm a brave boy," he said. "I'm braver

Marie

than a girl. I'm almost as brave as a soldier. I runned away all by myself, and walked miles and miles—fifty miles, I believe."

"That's nothing!" said Miss Busybody. "I've comed from Mittenplatz, and that is a very great distance. It must be more'n a hundred miles."

"Where's Marie?" said Boykin.

"Marie? Oh, I b'lieve Marie is at Bergstein, waiting for us." Miss Busybody lied boldly, blushing. "And anyhow, Boykin," she added, "if she does come, she will see your red cap and send you back to Berta."

"I won't go," said Boykin. "I'll put on your tam; there!" He snatched Miss Busybody's cap from her head and put it on.

"But my hair will come out of curl!" she cried; "and Marie will find me if I wear your red cap."

"Put something over your head, like the other little girls. Then they won't think you are proud and wear a hat," said Boykin.

"Oh, yes," said Miss Busybody; "and when they come we'll tie our toboggan onto theirs, and they'll think we are Swiss, too."

She tied her neckerchief over her head, and the two crouched behind the drift and waited for the procession.

"But I don't know what to say if they ask us anything," Boykin whispered.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

“You must roll your eyes up, so, like Marie, and say: ‘This is the little maiden of my heart. We love each other with great gladness, and we marry each other.’”

“But, Miss Busybody, I’m ’fraid that would not be quite the truth,” said Boykin. “I think—I think I’m engaged to Philippa. I kissed her. She is a velly pleasant person.”

“Philippa is nearly married to Dr. Engel already. And besides, she doesn’t like kisses. I asked her why she didn’t kiss Dr. Engel, and she told me so. I know it was the truth, because he was there, and he heard her, and he got very red. And I asked her if it was because he had a prickly beard, and—oh, Boykin! they’re coming!”

She pointed to the road, and Boykin seized her hand, and they stood up together, trembling.

All around them was the snow, and over them the deep blue arch of the sky. And far away, where the white met the blue on the edge of the Pitzenberg, there was a flash of moving colour and a piping of flutes. Along the road it came, the swift wonder of flags and garlands and music, and the children crushed each other’s hand, holding their breath.

The procession was tailing to Bergstein. First came a sleigh drawn by four grey horses, with bells and garlands; and in the sleigh were the

Marie

pipers whose notes stirred the valley from the sheeted snow up to the gaunt forest-tops.

Behind the sleigh the little peasants rode on toboggans tied in pairs, a long line that swayed and screamed and laughed with the lurching of the horses.

Each toboggan was decked with flags and wreaths of flowers, and the boy guiding it wore a garland of pine across his breast and paper roses in his hat. The girl sitting behind him was splendid in many-hued ribbons, and the procession wound like a broken rainbow on the snow.

Miss Busybody drew a deep breath; it was all so pretty. But she had not time to admire. They were coming! She dragged Boykin and the toboggan to the side of the road.

"Achtung! Achtung!" she shouted, above the noise of bells and pipes. "Achtung! Achtung!" to the man driving the sleigh.

The little toboggan, magnificent in yellow flags and red roses, had already caught his eye. He handed the reins to another man. The pace slackened; the horses stopped. He jumped down, ran along the line, tied the toboggan at the end, set the two children on it, and ran back to his horses. In another minute Boykin and Miss Busybody were bumping and swaying and screaming along the road.

The giddy delight of it, the fun and the excitement were enough; they had no time for

The Valley of the Great Shadow

thought till they reached Bergstein. Then they found that, in spite of their disguise, they had no share in the *fest*. They followed the children into a barn, and stood shyly watching while the peasants ate strange Swiss cakes and dipped their wooden spoons into the great bowl of curds and honey. By and by they tired of being onlookers. It was a dull *fest*. They wished they were back at home.

"Let's go home," said Boykin, in a loud whisper. "I love you, Miss Busybody, and I don't intend to marry Philippa. We'll go home and get married."

"Yes," said Miss Busybody; "we'll get married; then I won't have a nurse, and Marie can marry Jakob Meyer."

"No, she can't," Boykin said; "he's going to marry Berta. She will betroth to him on Sunday. I heard her tell cook."

They were on the road, and they stood out of the way of a sleigh that was coming towards them.

The woman in the sleigh was smiling very much. The eyes she turned to the man were glad and tender. Marie had played well; the game was in her hand. Jakob was driving her to Sölschen to see his mother. They would return to Mittenplatz pledged lovers; and next Sunday she, and not Berta, would drive with Jakob in the Procession of the Betrothed.

Marie

All at once the gladness dropped from her face. She had caught sight of the flags and roses of Miss Busybody's toboggan. And there was the child herself, standing with Boykin on the road, ten miles from home!

Marie grew pale, but fear for herself was as great as fear for her charge. Jakob's mood was not to be trusted; his fidelity was lightly balanced between herself and Berta. If he was thwarted now, and they took the children home, she knew well that Berta and not she would drive with him next Sunday in the Procession of the Betrothed. But her duty! She tried not to see the forlorn-looking little creatures toiling along the road.

How had they got there? And had the Fräulein Philippa forgotten her promise to take charge of Miss Busybody that afternoon? And how would they walk those ten miles back to the Mittenthal? They could not get home before dark; she could see the tired little feet trudging through the night. She heard their frightened cries. Her heart melted. She could not buy her own happiness at such a price.

Her eyes were hopeless when she laid her hand on Jakob's arm. "Seest thou, Jakob, the little naughty ones?"

Jakob looked stupidly before him.

"Ja wohl."

"Thou must stop, Jakob. I may not go with

The Valley of the Great Shadow

thee to see the dear mother." The tears broke from her eyes. "Thou seest I must take the naughty ones to their homes."

She looked pleadingly into Jakob's puzzled face. His mind slowly grasped the significance beyond the words. Marie refused to go on to Sölschen after he had hired a sleigh for her. What then? Berta would be willing enough to drive with him next Sunday.

"The little one is an angel of sweetness," Marie sobbed. "I may not leave her to suffer. Thou wilt let me go, Jakob?"

"Ja wohl," said Jakob, grimly, drawing in the reins.

At this moment there was a shout from the children:

"Marie! Marie! *dear* Marie!"

They ran together to the sleigh.

"Oh, Marie! have you come for us? We are *so* tired. We want to go home. We'll drive home with you and Jakob in the sleigh."

Marie looked timidly into Jakob's face.

"Wilt thou drive us back, Jakob?"

"Ja wohl," he said, sullenly. But so he would get back to Berta more quickly.

"Hurrah, Jakob!" Boykin cried. "And I will sit on your knee and hold the reins."

Before his sentence was finished he had clambered into the sleigh and was on Jakob's knee. Miss Busybody was climbing up the other side.

Marie

Marie helped her in, and tied her toboggan to the back of the sleigh.

"Hurrah! hurrah! Now we go home!" Boykin snapped the whip. Jakob turned the horses towards Mittenplatz.

"Now we are quite, quite happy," said Miss Busybody, with a comfortable sigh. "And we are a procession ourselves. We love each other, and are betrothed—Boykin and me, Marie and Jakob. Do you love Marie velly much, Jakob?"

Jakob cleared his throat, but maintained a sulky silence. His face wore a scowl. He was thinking of Berta's black eyebrows.

"Do you, Jakob, do you?" Miss Busybody persisted when he did not answer, and Boykin looked up and echoed:

"Do you love Marie, Jakob? Do you love Marie? do you, Jakob?"

"Ja wohl," Jakob growled, seeing that he could not escape an answer.

Miss Busybody clapped her hands. "Now we go home with mirth and great gladness. And Boykin and me will be married. And you will marry Marie, too, won't you, Jakob?"

And Boykin looked gravely at him: "Won't you, Jakob?"

"Ja wohl," said Jakob, stolidly.

Miss Busybody gave a long sigh. "I'm velly much relieved," she said. "I was 'fraid you

The Valley of the Great Shadow

would marry Berta. Berta is not kind like Marie; she pulls Boykin's hair."

"She slapped me once," Boykin said, pensively; "and my father said she had a devil of a temper."

Miss Busybody nestled closer against Marie. "I love Marie," she said; "she is kind. She gives me centimes for the hen that lays the eggs with the booful mottoes."

Marie wiped the tears on her face, and smiled. "Ach! the angel little one!"

"And my uncle says," Miss Busybody went on, "that when Marie is married he will give her a frock and lots of money, because she is good. Will you be married to Marie velly soon, Jakob?"

Jakob did not answer. At last Boykin interrupted his thoughts.

"Will you be married to Marie velly soon? Will you, Jakob?"

Jakob's face had cleared. He snapped his whip and made the horse trot.

"Ja wohl!" he said, cheerily. Then he smiled at Marie.

CHAPTER XI

THE ROYSTONS

I

It was early winter, three years before Philippa had come to the Mittenthal. That year the frost had caught and bound the lake suddenly. From Pitzen to the Grünwald it was a smooth stretch of smoked glass, darker for the light snow that lay on the fields and mountains. Here and there the shadows of the hills threw a deeper fold of night on the lake; and skating in and out of the shadows, in and out of the bands of moonlight, Royston and Adelaide Gower swayed along the ice. Where the stream ran that fed the lake the ice was still thin, and a row of poles shouted warning in the silence. The two skaters seldom spoke. Royston was guiding the girl, their hands intertwined, and the loneliness, the moonlight, the measured motion, held him in a dream. He could have gone on like that forever, held to life only by the closeness of the girl's clasp.

"We are on the thin ice!"

Her voice, shrill and startled, rang suddenly.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

He woke, and the next instant swung out beyond the poles. Then he laughed.

"Little coward! Did you think you were in danger?"

"What else?" she said, petulantly. "Thin ice and thirty feet of water. If we had gone in, we must have been drowned."

He smiled confidently. "You at least would have been saved."

"At the cost of your life?" Her voice softened.

"Why not? It's no hardship to die in saving another life."

She shuddered. "I couldn't do it; I love my life too much. I love it so much I would accept it at any cost." The soft voice made the words harder.

"Fortunately," Royston said, drily, "there is no need to sacrifice any one's life."

"And even if you had fished me out, I might have died from the chill," she said, musingly.

He had to laugh; she was so frankly selfish. Then his face softened. "I forgot that you are a delicate little thing. You are always so gay one doesn't think of you as an invalid."

"I'm not an invalid," she cried. "I'm quite strong. I can do everything that other people do, except leave the Mittenthal."

"But that is hardest of all! This place is glorious for a short stay, or if one is ill, but I

The Roystons

should hate it if I were condemned to live in it all my life."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't! The mountains have a fascination. After you have once felt it, it's impossible to live anywhere else. Besides, something pleasant comes along every day to make you forget you are a prisoner. To-night, for instance, makes up for all I have suffered here."

"But that is absurd," he said, practically. "How can an hour's skating atone for years of suffering?"

There was a conscious note in her laugh. "Oh, I don't know; but I am happy. I like all this—the mystery, the moonlight, gliding on and on, alone with you."

Royston could not fail to understand the stress on the last word. When he spoke next there was a perceptible dryness in his manner.

"We ought, perhaps, to be going back now, Miss Gower."

"So soon?" she cried, dismayed. "It can't be nine yet. Besides, I want to have some supper at the Grünwald."

He looked at the head of the lake, a mile away, where the light of the hotel twinkled, and he shrugged his shoulders.

"Of course—if you want supper. But it is later than you think." He stopped and glanced towards Pitzen, expecting her to agree to their

The Valley of the Great Shadow

return, but she remained silent. The impatient tap of her skate on the ice was the only sound. He shrugged his shoulders again, and struck out towards the Grünwald. But the charm of the night was over. He even wished that he had refused to go when she had proposed this moonlight skating. They had not been wise to come alone, either. If the ice had broken just now, there would have been no help at hand.

"You are very dull!" She lifted a pouting face to his.

"Am I? By the way, I thought some of the other men were coming."

"They spoke of it. The Professor changed his mind at the last moment. But don't you like it better without them?"

Her voice was sharp. There was an edge, too, in her silence when he did not answer.

At the end of the lake he took off her skates. They climbed the slippery path to the Grünwald without speaking. But supper restored their good temper, and he sat on, amused at her chatter, till the clock striking made him start up.

"Eleven o'clock! Impossible! We must go at once. We can't get back before midnight. Are you ready, Miss Gower?"

She looked at his disturbed face, and laughed.

"But, Mr. Royston, the hour is not criminal."

"My thoughtlessness is," he answered. "You should have been asleep an hour ago."

The Roystons

‘Nonsense! This is great fun. Besides, I would rather have one hour like this with you than—’ She stopped.

Royston laughed awkwardly. He assured himself there was nothing in the words. The girl was always frank.

Well, they could only make the best of the adventure. It would be pleasant enough to go gliding along the ice under the moon. He would take the good of the moment, and leave the consequences. He caught Adelaide’s hand, and they swung out on the black track of ice, singing a skating song they had learned that year in the Mittenthal.

“In the ice on which we hover
We but see the mirrored moon,
As we chase the brightness of her
On the ringing iron shoon—
But the black abyss is under,
And the silence and the wonder
Of the sleeping night lagoon;
And black as death
Is all beneath;
And the thawing cometh soon.”

“I don’t like the words,” she said, when they stopped. “They are stupid and solemn. Why should we be reminded of death? Oh, there is nothing better than life! It is good to live, to see the moonlight and the great mountains, and to taste the cold. One drinks joy in this air, and the silence is like wine.”

The Valley of the Great Shadow

"Youth is better than life," he answered. "To feel the blood swing in the veins—to know that one has power and time to carve one's future."

"But what is youth?" she asked.

"That is youth—to see life and to be glad; to see death, and not to fear it."

He felt her fingers close tighter on his.

"I fear death," she whispered. "You called me a coward to-night, and it is true. Dr. Engel says I am quite well, yet I dare not go away from the Mittenthal lest I should get ill again and die."

"Poor little girl! If I could save you from death, I would. It would be work worth doing."

"But you are doing fine work, aren't you? I heard about the speeches you made last session."

"They were nothing. But I hope to make a career for myself."

She looked up at him, and saw a wavering determination on his face.

"I believe you could do anything that you tried to do," she cried, enthusiastically.

"I should try to do anything that I ought to do."

"You talk like an old man," she said; "yet you have the great gift of youth. I don't want your great gift if it makes you solemn. Laughter is a greater gift—things joyous, and mirth and love."

The Roystons

"You almost persuade me that the greatest of these is love." He smiled at her as he spoke. Yes, he was almost persuaded. She was pretty and charming. A wave of passion swept him off his feet. Wasn't the greatest thing in life love?

But in another moment he regained his emotional footing. They had come to the bank. He busied himself with her skates, and they took the road through Pitzen, neither speaking.

Adelaide was shy and subdued. Royston wondered if she could have read his thoughts, that her manner was so conscious.

A little way from the hotel they met the Professor, Dr. Engel, and some others, carrying ice-ladders and ropes. Their late return had spread rumours of an accident.

The search-party turned back with them, the Professor shouting that it was always a mistake to be guided by feelings of humanity. The Royal was lighted still, and full of excitement. Fearing an accident, no one had gone to bed. Adelaide escaped, laughing, from their questions; but next morning she faced a sentiment from which escape was not so easy. When she appeared on the balcony where the invalids sunned themselves, there was a sudden hush in the talk. In the drawing-room it was the same thing. The gossips were discussing her night adventure, and with no gentleness.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

Coming into the reading-room late that night, Royston found her huddled up in a corner behind the *Lady*, in abject misery.

He had not spoken to her all day—indeed he had shunned her; and now he went to her reluctantly.

“Aren’t you feeling well?” he said, stiffly.

She screened her face behind the paper, but he heard her low sobs.

“Something has happened,” he said, distressed. “Won’t you tell me what makes you cry like this?” He sat down beside her, and gently drew aside the paper. She lifted her face, all pale and downcast.

“These horrid, gossiping women!” she sobbed. “I hate them all! Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?”

Royston’s brow knitted. He knew what scandal was saying.

“You would surely not notice a set of idle tongues!” he said.

“Oh, but I do!” she wailed. “It makes me wretched. I know what gossip is in a place like this. A sentence is enough—to take away a reputation—and that they should say such things—of me—” She broke off, moaning.

Royston’s face was stormy. He sat still and said nothing. Presently she lifted herself.

“It is easy for you to sit there,” she said,

The Roystons

plaintively. "You don't care. You are a man, and you don't care. But for me it is different. You can't understand what it means to a girl to be told that she—that she is—compromised."

She hid her face again, and her body shook with her weeping. Royston looked at her in great perplexity, his mouth hardening.

All this emotion seemed to him forced and exaggerated. He had already been told that he had compromised the girl, but the thing had seemed too trivial. He could not understand that any one should give it a moment's serious consideration, and here was Adelaide breaking her heart over it. How soft and white she looked—colourless but for the garnets round her neck.

Her trouble softened him, and he tried to reason it away. But it was of no use. "Compromised" was the point on which all his arguments were impaled.

"Go away," she said. "What do you care? You are a man, and you can't understand. You bring all this on me, and then you leave me to bear it alone."

"But, my good girl—"

"Don't!"

She sprang to her feet. The light ran along her necklace like a circle of fire.

"I thought you were a brave man," she said,

The Valley of the Great Shadow

panting between each word; "you are not. You are like all the rest. What does it matter if the woman suffers? You are free."

Royston made a step forward, his face pale and set. "Tell me how I make you suffer."

She shrank from the anger in his eyes; her eyelids quivered and drooped.

"It is horrible," she faltered. "You will go away, and it will be nothing to you. But people are always hard on women. I have to stay here—and—and—"

"Finish," he said, curtly.

"I shall not be asked anywhere any more, because—people will say I am not—quite—nice. And I can't bear it."

She ran from him, and threw herself again on the sofa, and hid her face in the cushion.

Royston remained staring at her, and as he looked the lines of his mouth gathered strength, though the light in his eye was uncertain. At last he spoke, and the words dropped from him one by one, colourless and dead.

"There is one way in which it may be borne—if you are my wife. Will you give me the right to silence this gossip?"

Adelaide looked up. A sudden light darted through the storm in her eyes.

"Your wife? To marry you?"

"Yes." The word seemed wrung from him against his will.

The Roystons

Her lips parted. A quick happiness tossed its light about her.

"Ah!" She drew a long breath. "This was what you meant last night when you said love was best—you love me?"

Her eager eyes did not wait for an answer from his. They seemed to be darting from thought to thought, and missed the irresolution on his face.

"Love is best," he answered. Then he held out his hand to her. "Then you will be my wife?"

She sprang to him and threw her arms round his neck.

"Oh, my dear! What do I care for anybody so long as you love me?" The pressure of her lips fired the man's passion. His arms closed round her. "Love is best! Love is best! Love is best!" The words rained among his kisses.

It was not till the following week, when they were discussing their plans, that Royston saw what he had done.

"Leave the Mittenthal?" Adelaide laughed. "Not for worlds! I should die in a month. I can only live in the high air. No; you must live here with me."

"But, my child, my work is in London."

"Bring your work here."

He laughed constrainedly. "You forget that I am in the House."

The Valley of the Great Shadow

"Then you must give it up."

She spoke quite simply and decisively. Royston turned away, biting his lips. He had learned the uselessness of arguing with her, but it was maddening that she should speak so calmly of sacrificing his career. And why should it be sacrificed? If she would not leave the Mitten-thal, their engagement must come to an end.

She had no right to keep him in the valley for a whim. He took two or three hurried turns about the room. Then he moved slowly round to the sofa where she sat. She had thrown her head back, and was watching him through half-closed lids. She smiled, and held out her hands.

"Well?" she laughed, softly; "well?"

"I must go," he stammered, avoiding her eyes. "My work is everything to me."

"That was in the past." She blew a kiss at him. "Now love is everything to you."

He looked down at her, a dumb appeal in his glance. Her eyes held him bound.

Suddenly she lifted herself and twisted her arms round his neck, and with a child's irresponsible tyranny, drew him down.

"You are love's prisoner. What is your work compared with my happiness? I will not release you."

He smiled bitterly, feeling her arms like chains about him. It was true what she said. He was a prisoner—but of honour, not love.

The Roystons

"But I thought only rich men got into Parliament," she pouted, ten minutes later.

Royston shook his head; his face was very pale. "Not all. I am a poor man. My election expenses were paid by my uncle. I make what income I have by journalism. At my uncle's death I shall be rich, but that is not to be counted on."

"Never mind; I have enough for us both," she said, cheerfully. "Money need be no obstacle. And you can still write."

"I suppose so," he hesitated. "I can write for magazines, at any rate." He knew that Adelaide was well enough off.

"Of course you can. Oh, we shall be very comfortable. We will take a pretty flat, and have people to dinner every night. It will be great fun—better than hotel life. Now, confess that you are a happy man. You have youth, leisure, love—all the gifts of the gods."

She smiled alluringly, but he gave her no answering smile. His burnt out passion strewed his life with ashes; it had been like a lava-stream, quickly cooled, that now lay heavy on life and ambition. But he had bound himself to the girl; and honour stood like a grim sentinel, forbidding him to go beyond his word.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

II

Frowning, Royston lifted his head from his writing. The walls were thin, and the baby's crying sounded through them. The child had been crying all the morning, and more than once already he had interrupted his work to comfort it.

His eyes brooded over the scene in the next room: Adelaide on the sofa in a litter of fashion papers, too busy remodelling a gown to attend to her baby.

His glance moved about him, and grew darker as it fell on the disorder everywhere. This was his study, but it might as well have been the rubbish-room of the flat. All the overflow of the apartment was piled into it—saucepans were on the stove, clothes on the sofa, shoes strewn the floor, the baby's bath was in the corner.

It was a picture of the squalid life he had lived for three years, and he ground his teeth as he saw it. This was the end of his ambition—a loveless marriage, a frivolous wife, wasted days, a house that shamed the meanest chalet in the valley, and the burden of a neglected child.

He laid his head on his arms in his misery, and strove to find excuses for his wife. It was not altogether her fault. She was no manager,

The Roystons

and could not train servants. She was not strong, either, and since the baby's birth she had lost her energy. It was his fault, who could not afford to keep better servants because he earned so little by his writing. In the three years he had not made as much money as he made in London in one year. He could not control Adelaide's expenditure of her income. She wasted it on herself; but he had not remonstrated with her after the day when she had retorted by an allusion to his poverty.

It was all the more maddening because it was she who prevented him from going to work in London. There he could have made an income and a name, but here there was nothing that a man could do. His youth was going, and his strength. His mind was worn by the daily friction of Adelaide's moods; his will weakened. "To see death, and not fear it; this is youth," he had said. Now, "To see death, and pray for it; this is to be old," he knew.

God! how he longed for death to end this tragedy of waste! Release could only come by death—his own or his wife's. He jerked himself away from the thought, and sprang up and went into the next room.

Adelaide held up an armful of laces to him. "See what a lovely bodice I have made for to-night? Now, confess that you have a clever wife."

The Valley of the Great Shadow

"That child has been crying for an hour, Adelaide."

"Yes, poor little mite. I think he must have inherited his bad temper from you. You grow more like a bear every day."

"Why don't you quiet him?" he said, restrainedly. "Can't you see that he is ill?"

"And if he is, whose fault is it? How can he be well when he never goes out? Other fathers provide nurses and perambulators for their children." ("And the money you have spent on that lace would have bought the perambulator," he thought.)

"He is not heavy," he said aloud. "You should let Rosa take him out."

"I want Rosa to do my dress," she smiled. "You forget that I am going to the dance at the Royal to-night."

Royston turned away, lifted the child and carried him onto the balcony, where he walked about with him till he fell asleep.

By that time his anger had cooled. He could even pity the irresponsible girl. Her taunt had cut. It was he who had failed to provide for his family. His power lay in political writing; but what use was it to send to London articles that arrived when the situation was a week old? He cursed the weakness that kept him tied to this woman's will. She was stronger than he, and he

The Roystons

could not free himself from her arms round his neck.

He had tried the magazines, but his pen was new, and it was difficult to secure foothold there. He would have taken a pupil, but he shrank from disclosing the secrets of his household. He wanted no witness to the daily scenes with Adelaide. He had tried to find pupils in the hotels, and had failed.

He was fettered on every side; the outlook was hopeless. At nine o'clock that night Adelaide came into the study, where he sat bending over the child's cradle. She was in white from head to foot, except for the garnets.

"Well, aren't you going to tell me that I look nice?" she said, gaily, tapping his shoulder with her fan.

He pointed to the baby, gasping in its sleep. "Child, child," he groaned, "have you no heart?"

She looked down at the cradle, a swiftly passing tenderness in her face.

"What a poor white mite it is!" She drew on her glove slowly and thoughtfully. "Do you know," she went on musingly, "it is one of the disappointments of my marriage that I didn't have a little daughter. It would have been fun to dress her in pretty clothes. But what can you do with a boy?"

"You might keep him clean," said Royston, significantly.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

"And be scolded for extravagance in laundry bills?" she smiled. "Ah, there is the sleigh. Bother! the bells have waked him! What a nuisance!"

The baby held up his arms and caught at the red stones, and she lifted him and kissed him, while Royston looked on in a melting silence.

She was so pretty and sweet, holding the child and hushing him to sleep with the croon of the soft, gliding song:

"In the ice on which we hover
We but see the mirrored moon,
As we chase the brightness of her
On the ringing iron shoon."

The sleigh-bells sounded again under the window, and she hastily gave the child to her husband.

"Take him, dear; I must go. You are very foolish not to come, too. You see there is nothing wrong with baby. He only wants to be noticed a little."

"I tell you he is ill," he answered, shortly; "and the illnesses of young children are not to be trifled with. My dear," his anxiety thrust an entreaty through his impatience, "don't leave him to-night. See how soon you quiet him. The poor little chap likes his mother best, you know."

She laughed lightly. "Booh! You are an old woman! If I listened to you, I would never go anywhere. Bye-bye, my baby."

She kissed the child and ran from the room,

The Roystons

and Royston paced the floor miserably, the boy in his arms.

When he slept he laid him in the cradle, and sat down at his desk. It would not be his fault if they could not have things different. Hours passed while he wrote, and through his writing throbbed the heavy breathing of the child. All at once it changed to a quick gasping, and Royston, springing up, saw the boy's limbs convulsed. He shouted for Rosa, asleep in the kitchen, and sent her for Dr. Engel. And then, for an awful hour, alone and helpless in his ignorance, he watched the tiny struggle for life. When Dr. Engel came at last Royston looked up dumbly. The shadow of death was on his face, too.

The silence was broken by the sleigh-bells.

Royston lifted his head, and a scowl came into his eyes. He could not forgive the woman who had left her child to die.

His stern face met her when she looked in at the door, her eyes shining, her face rosy, happiness in every quick breath.

"Such a delicious dance, Edward! I didn't sit out once, and—" She stopped in the middle of the floor and frowned at him.

"Well, at least you needn't look like a thunderstorm; I haven't done anything so very dreadful."

The Valley of the Great Shadow

"You have done this," he said; and he caught her roughly and dragged her to the cradle.

She shook herself free of him, glanced down, and gave a cry. "Oh, who has killed my little baby?"

"*You* have killed him," Royston said.

She turned terrified, appealing eyes to him, but his face was relentless. With an instinct of protection, she snatched up the child, and holding him close, crouched behind the cradle, sobbing tearlessly. The dead face lay pallid against her bare bosom. Presently she began to rock herself, hushing the baby with broken notes of the song she had sung to it before.

Royston could not bear the sight. Pity mastered him, and he stooped, and would have taken the child from her, but her arms tightened and she sprang up.

"Don't touch him!" she cried, shrilly. "Don't dare to touch him! You have stolen my baby's last hours from me. You might have sent for me, but you let me go on dancing—while he died—that you might say I murdered him. Brute! to revenge yourself so!"

"I didn't think—I called Engel—I—"

But she interrupted furiously: "Oh, don't speak to me! Go away! All this misery is your doing; I was so happy, and since we married I haven't known what happiness is."

"Adelaide, my poor girl—" Tears were in

The Roystons

Royston's eyes. He stepped towards her, but she moved backward, holding the dead child between them.

"Don't touch me!" she said, coldly, suddenly quiet. "Leave me; go away. I never want to see your face again!"

The chill of the words numbed him. His strength left him and his limbs shook. He gazed at her, pity and weakness and pain in his eyes; then he turned and stumbled out of the room. He sat gazing with smitten eyes at the night. Orion swung above the gleam of a dagger. The stars died; clouds were folded about the sky. Six o'clock tolled out from the tower. It was another day. He went into the hall, and his hand groped blunderingly on the rack for his hat. It struck his skates hanging there. Mechanically he took them down, and went out of the house and on to the road. He did not choose his direction. He went out blindly, whipped on by Adelaide's voice. Now she was saying, "I never want to see your face again," and now, "Since we married I haven't known what happiness is," and now she was singing that horrible gliding song to the dead child.

The song mesmerized him. His feet crunched the snow as he walked, but he knew nothing of the frozen road and the starless hour. He was in a dream, skating on the lake in the moonlight, and Adelaide's hands were warm in his.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

They burned like fire in his palms, and made him unconscious of the cold that froze his blood. The frost stabbed the valley with a thousand knives, but he walked on untouched. He reached the lake. Above him Schwarzberg and Weissberg stood cold and silent, looking down at a splash of night on the snow—the large circle swept on the lake for the skating. Beyond the circle a long line of blocks of ice, newly cut, looked like a procession of ghosts.

Still in a dream, Royston put on his skates and slid out on the ice. He skated mechanically, moving round and round and round that endless circle. Presently the dim dawn glided in like moonlight over the lake. He gazed round him bewildered. It was surely the night he had skated with Adelaide. She was skating here beside him, singing of “the black abysses under—”

But that was not true. No one was singing.

The silence shocked into his consciousness. He looked round him, and understood where he was and what had driven him there. And beyond that night's work he saw clearly the work of that other night which had fathered this.

“What a fool I was,” he thought, bitterly. “What a weak fool. Honour was not in the question at all. No gossip could have done the harm this marriage has done. I've sacrificed everything to my weakness. And it's done no

The Roystons

good. She hasn't known happiness since she married me, while I fooled myself thinking she at least was happy."

He struck out recklessly beyond the circle towards the line of blocks that crossed the lake like a pale procession. He did not notice the poles that warned him away. A sound like the crack of a pistol followed his curving path, but he did not heed it. He could only hear Adelaide's voice: "I was so happy. All this misery is your doing."

Now here, now there, he swung on his skates, trying to get away from the horror that held him. The awful cold of the morning was in his blood, benumbing sensation; despair was in his heart, stupefying consciousness. He was close to the last blocks, cut from the lake the day before, but he did not see them. He was deaf to the sharp snapping, blind to the warning poles.

There was a sudden crack of rent ice, a splash, a muffled cry, and the water sucked him in.

He rose again, and struck out blindly, cutting his hands against the edge of the splintered ice. Life was strong in him, and the instinct to live, and he caught at the floating ice that slipped from his touch and sheered under the water. If he could only reach the side where the ice was thicker! But the water numbed his arms, dulled his strength, dulled even the desire for life.

While he struggled, the sobs of his wife

The Valley of the Great Shadow

rushed with the rushing waters in his ears, and life thrilled again at the sound.

A block floated beside him. Strong in his desperation, he swung himself to it, caught at it, and partly lifted himself from the water. The block was steady; he might even yet gain foothold. His tortured eyes fastened themselves on the ice, and saw it splashed with drops of blood. They were like the round little stones of Adelaide's necklace. Under them, in the pale ice, half-dazed, he seemed to see the gleam of the dead child's face. Her voice rushed with the rushing sound in his ears, "I never want to see your face again." Once more the words froze his heart. His strength went from him, and his grasp failed.

The ice shuddered under him. With a long, gurgling sob he slipped into the night.

The ice shook itself free, rose again, and quieted with the quieting water. Snow began to fall—thick, steady flakes that closed about the line of blocks and wrapped them round until nothing could be seen of the ghostly procession that had crossed the lake in the dawn.

"The child is dead. You must let me put him in the coffin," Engel said.

Adelaide's arms tightened round the baby. "If I could only see his face again," she said, blankly. She had been saying it for twenty-four

The Roystons

hours, holding the child's mouth pressed to her breast. Engel's face was strained and baffled. He could do nothing. He had scarcely left Adelaide since he had heard of Royston's disappearance. He was the only person she would see. Royston's skates were missing, too; but whatever secret their absence whispered had been hushed up by the snow. Its sheet was spread across the lake from end to end. A white pall of silence lay also on Engel's face.

The day before, crossing the Pitzenberg in the early morning, he had heard sharp, cracking sounds. He had thought it was the cracking of a peasant's whip, but it might have been the snap of ice. He had not given any importance to it until Rosa had told him that Royston's skates were gone. But it was too late then to find out the truth. The newly frozen ice was covered with snow.

"If I could only see his face again," Adelaide moaned.

"He may come back; he may not be dead," Engel said, gently.

She was still in the low dress she had worn at the dance. It was horrible to see the baby's dead lips on the rose of her bosom.

"He is dead," she answered, dully. "I saw him among the Todten-Volk. He carried my baby. He was wet and dripping. He is drowned in the lake—"

The Valley of the Great Shadow

"The lake is frozen from end to end."

"He is there, drowned. If I could only see his face again! If I could only see his face again!"

"Let me put the child in its coffin."

"No, no; the poor little chap likes his mother best." She tightened her arms again, and began to sing, rocking backwards and forwards:

"In the ice on which we hover
We but see the mirrored moon—

She stopped, and her gaze grew fixed;

"But the black abyss is under,"

she went on;

"And black as death
Is all beneath;
And the thawing cometh soon."

"If I could only see his face again!" The words came like the refrain of the song.

Engel's eyes were full. He looked at her, not knowing what to do. "She ought to have some woman with her," he thought. But she had refused to see her friends, Frau Bullen and Simplicity and Miss Blake. It seemed useless for him to stay, but he could not go and leave her alone there, nursing the dead baby.

He wished Philippa had been her friend—Philippa, who was gentle and sympathetic, and who knew death. She would not jar on strained nerves. He had seen her nursing Babette, and

The Roystons

comforting Sonnie Baker's aunt. She was the kind of woman who could help other women. She would help this poor distraught creature, if any one could.

He remembered that she had asked him to let her work with him, and he had refused ungraciously. It would be humiliating now to confess that he needed her help. Tch! what was his humiliation compared with Mrs. Royston's need? He wrote a note quickly: "Will you come and help me? Mrs. Royston needs you. I can do nothing for her."

Philippa came back with Rosa, who had taken the note. Engel met her at the door. Philippa scarcely saw him. Her eyes sprang past him to Adelaide and the child. Engel never forgot the look on her face. She stooped to Adelaide.

"You poor soul! You poor soul!" The tears ran down her face.

Adelaide looked up blankly. "If I could only see his face again."

"You look so tired. Let me hold baby," Philippa said.

She lifted the child and held him to her. Her tears were his baptism.

Engel turned away with a lump in his throat.

Adelaide's eyes followed Philippa dully, a kind of dead jealousy in them. She watched her lay the baby in his little white coffin, and come back to her.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

"He looks so happy in his little bed," Philippa said, softly.

Adelaide's lips quivered. She burst into passionate weeping.

"If I could only see my husband in his coffin!" she moaned.

The grey dawn wrapped the mountains. The houses and trees hung in the mist, deadly still. An awful silence froze the valley. The great shadow of the winged angel hung low and had not yet lifted.

People in hotel and chalet were still dreaming. The eyes of the houses were blank and lifeless; their lids closed to the passing of quick and dead.

Along the frozen road the steps of the women made no sound. They moved slowly, for the child went with them, and his little feet had not learned to walk. They moved slowly along the valley, hedged about by the silence. Philippa's knees shook as they went, but Adelaide walked steadily. The two faces wore the same grey. The little white coffin made a little white bridge between them.

They went with bowed heads. Life held only the long white road, the little white bridge, the great silence.

The road wound upward to the *friedhof*. When they came in sight of the gates, and the

The Roystons

men waiting, Adelaide's steps dragged. She took the coffin from Philippa and held it against her breast, and lifted her face.

"This is not the grave," Philippa whispered.

"Six feet of space for that tiny span of life?"

"His father's grave," Adelaide said, in a thick voice. "He will come soon."

They stood gazing down at the little white bridge that was so small it could not unite the two walls of the grave. Then Philippa took a handful of snow and let it fall loosely through her fingers.

"Snow to snow, ice to ice, star to star!" The words fell hushed. The crystals fluttered down on the little white bridge that was so long it spanned the great gulf between death and life.

CHAPTER XII

MISS BUSYBODY

The Professor shuffled along the road that crossed the Grünwasser and led to the Tannenswald. He shuffled slowly, his shoulders bowed under a new weight of thought. The slant of his hat on his forehead was the angle of depression.

"It won't do, it won't do!" he muttered to himself. "This affair of Royston's is an object-lesson. As well depend on the devil himself for an income as on your wife. It won't do! I'll tell her so this very day. Nice woman, charming woman, sensible creature—one in a thousand; but it won't do! If poor Royston had married her instead of that butterfly now! Ah, poor fellow! Queer thing that he should have gone where he knew the ice was thin—very queer, indeed. And queer that he should have been found when they began to cut the ice again. Poor fellow! Well, it's an object-lesson to me not to set up house on my wife's money. I'll tell her it won't do." He looked up, frowning fiercely. "I tell you it won't do!" He addressed himself, testily.

Miss Busybody

The Pension Tannenwald stood before him. He gazed at it, slowly shaking his head. What ghastly hours he had spent there! How he had missed Miss Blake! He had been miserable without her. He would be miserable without her again. But no. He could not do without her. He would tell her that marriage was impossible, but they would remain friends. They would live in the same place always; inseparable friends, but independent of each other. A laugh pealed out, as if in mockery of his scheme.

The Professor gave a great start, and pushed up his hat to see who was laughing at him; then his brow smoothed. It was only that little imp of a Miss Busybody.

She was dancing along the road, dragging Miss Blake with her. The Professor was astonished to see that Miss Blake could run as well as Miss Busybody.

She smiled a deprecating smile as she came nearer. "I offered to amuse the little dear," she explained. "You have heard about the Major?"

"My Uncle Rob is velly ill," said Miss Busybody, with importance. "I must be amused all the time, Professor, because he is velly ill, you know. Marie says I'll be a bereaved—like Mrs. Royston."

The Professor shuffled along with the two.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

"Marie says it's the snow melting that makes him ill," Miss Busybody chattered on. "Philippa's going away when the snow melts, but Miss Blake can't go, because she has no money."

"My dear, little girls should be seen, and not heard." Miss Blake's blush cast a red glow on the Professor's face. He stopped and faced her.

"What do you mean by that? I thought you were rich."

She shook her head cheerfully.

"Not now; I gave up my fortune, you know."

"The deuce you did! What made you do it? To whom did you give it?"

Surprise shot through the tender light in Miss Blake's china-blue eyes.

"Why, don't you remember? I gave it to *you*. You surely remember the deed of gift?"

"The—deed—of—gift?" said the Professor, slowly. Yes, he remembered that letter now. He stood lost in thought, his mind rapidly grasping the situation.

"What is a deed of gift, Professor? Professor, what is a deed of gift?"

Miss Busybody plucked at his coat-tail to attract his attention.

"A—deed—of—gift?" said the Professor, slowly. He was smiling at Miss Blake; the tenderness in his eyes made the blue goggles dim.

Miss Busybody

"A deed of gift is when a generous woman gives herself in deed to a man who doesn't deserve her."

"Oh, Professor! indeed, not that," Miss Blake murmured, dropping her words breathlessly.

"Yes, ma'am; indeed that!" he insisted.

Miss Busybody looked from one to the other with puzzled eyes. "You are two funny people. I don't know what you mean! Oh, I see Dr. Engel!" She dropped Miss Blake's hand. "I'm going to take my Philippa to him. She is broken, and he promised to mend her."

The Professor watched the fat gaiters scamper away. When he saw Miss Busybody hurry Dr. Engel into his house, he looked down at Miss Blake, who was shrinking and fluttering like a little bird newly caught.

"I'm a very good surgeon," Engel was telling Miss Busybody. "The doll's arm is in splints; I've put a bandage on, and you mustn't take it off. To-morrow you can bring her to see me again. Will you?"

Miss Busybody nodded. "Yes, I will. I like to come and see your funny things, and those dear, dear little bottles."

Her eyes swept round Engel's surgery, gathering up every detail. Suddenly she clapped her hands.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

"You've got Angel John! It's muvver's Angel John!"

She was dancing with delight before the bracket where the St. John stood that Philippa had given Engel.

"It's muvver's! it's muvver's!" she shouted. "Give him to me; I want to kiss him again."

Engel stood hesitating before the child. The shadow was on his face again. He knew that Miss Busybody was Isolde's child, and he remembered the little St. John that he had given to his betrothed in Florence.

"It is not your mother's," he said, slowly handing the bronze to the child; "it is mine."

"No, no! it's muvver's! the very same!" Miss Busybody hugged the little bronze, and crooned over it, forgetting Engel.

He turned away from the sight, and sat down, covering his face with his hands. His sigh made the child remorseful. She climbed on his knee and drew down his hand. "Don't cry. I won't take him away from you. But it is truly my muvver's Angel John that she loved just dref-fully. I know the story. I'll tell you, shall I?"

"What is the story?"

She settled herself on his knee, and lifted her soft eyes to his. "My muvver telled it me," she said, earnestly. "Angel John was just awfully good—the best man that ever lived. And he loved a naughty lady, but she wasn't

Miss Busybody

good. And one day she took a big sharp thorn and stuck it right through him, so that it went through his heart. And poor Angel John went away dreffully wounded. And God said to him: 'Angel John, go away into the wilderness, and stay by yourself, and you'll forget the naughty lady; and you shall eat honey and locusts to make up.' And Angel John went away, and stayed by himself—and one day—one day—"

Miss Busybody's eyes were shining, her whole face was shining with breathless happiness. "What do you think? While he was standing all alone, somebody came and stood by him—somebody booful, that had a kind face, and kissed Angel John, and—guess who it was?"

"I can't."

"No, you can't, because He had the dreffullest long name, and it took me weeks to learn it."

"What was His name?"

"It was—" She folded her hands, and her voice dropped to the tone in which she said her prayers. "It was Strong-Son-of-God-Immortal-Love."

"I b'lieve you're crying; and that's great nonsense, for I said I wouldn't take him from you." She looked at Engel with great severity.

"No, no. Is that all the story?"

"'Tisn't quite all. There's the bit about the Naughty Lady. Well, you know, she was dreffully sorry, but it was no use being sorry. And

The Valley of the Great Shadow

she fretted about it. And she asked God to let her go to the wilderness, to pull the sharp thorn out of Angel John's heart. And God said: 'No, you can't go; you aren't good enough. But I won't forget him. And one day I'll send a good woman into the wilderness, and she will pull the thorn out.' That's all."

Miss Busybody remained silent, thinking. Suddenly she spoke. "I know another story about another John. I'll tell you, shall I?"

Engel nodded.

"Philippa telled me. This one was not a great angel; he was only a saint. And people were cruel to him. And they sent him to live all alone on an island in the sea. And he was very sad. And God loved him, and didn't forget him. And He showed him things—angels, and cities made of pearls, and great glorious rainbows that you can walk on right into heaven. And God said: 'Tell what you see, that poor men who are sad may know that one day they shan't be sad any longer, for I will wipe away all tears from all faces!' But I think God must want a lot of handkerchiefs to wipe up the tears of everybody that cries."

She scrambled down from his knee. "I'm tired," she said. "It takes a long time telling stories. I don't think I'll come again. I don't like your house much. It feels velly dismal. It makes me want my muvver again."

Miss Busybody

Miss Busybody's mouth was trembling.

Engel smothered a groan. He stepped sharply to the door.

"Jakob, Jakob!" he called.

Jakob came from the kitchen, hiding a yawn.

"Ja wohl," he answered.

"Carry the child back to her nurse," said Engel.

"Ja wohl," said Jakob.

He lifted Miss Busybody, who threw her arms round his neck. "I want Marie; carry me to Marie," she sobbed.

"Ja wohl," said Jakob.

Engel sat down again slowly. His face was very white. His eyes did not stir from the little St. John on the table, where Miss Busybody had left it. The story she had told him was in his heart, but he was thinking of the child. Had she come to take out the thorn her mother had struck into his life. He had come fresh from his talk with Major Sanderson, when he had lifted the only shadow on the face of the dying man by telling him that he would adopt the child. The Major's pension died with him, but he had sheltered Miss Busybody's future by getting her admittance into a school for officers' orphans. He had begged Engel to send Marie with Miss Busybody to the school after his death.

Engel's throat had tightened as he listened.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

"That gay little heart doomed to an asylum for orphans?"

He had known that Isolde's people were dead. Now Major Sanderson told him that he was Stannard's half-brother and the child's only relative on her father's side.

"Let me take her for my own child," Engel said, hoarsely. "She ought to have been my child."

It had been settled only an hour ago. Engel had felt, with a great throb of happiness, that though he might never know love of wife, he would be no longer childless.

And now Miss Busybody's story had shown him that Isolde had not been heartless. It might be that he had misunderstood her that day in the Certosa; that in his haste he had forced her to marry Stannard. Who could tell? He would never know now. One thing he understood from the child's story: she had never forgotten him. She had kept the last thing he had given to her. He remembered that she had called her child Johanna.

Engel thought of his dead love in a wistful tenderness, sad and regretful, and yet without pain. His life was no longer empty. He would have Isolde's child for his own. It would not be long now. He stepped onto the balcony and looked across the meadow to the Hotel Royal. His glance strayed about the window of the room

Miss Busybody

where Major Sanderson was fighting his last fight. The window was open and the sun was full upon it.

Standing there, Engel heard Jerningham's violin sweeping across the moan of the Grünwasser, a faint, mysterious throb that found its echo in the beat of his heart. He remembered the night when he had heard Sonnie's violin, and it had waked his love for Philippa. His eyes, fixed dreamily, grew very sad. Well, all that was ended now. His silence must have killed the love she had once confessed. If he had only trusted her! What a fool he had been to doubt her! Pain lashed his heart with knotted cords. His face was suffering. And yet Isolde's love had come back to him. He sighed heavily. Ah, well, the child would fill his life. It would not be altogether lonely.

A sudden white flash in one of the windows of the hotel made his gaze waver. Some one had drawn the blind in Major Sanderson's room.

Philippa sat very still, her head bent over Miss Busybody, asleep in her arms. The child's face was stained with tears. She had been crying because they had not let her say good-bye to Uncle Rob.

"It isn't velly fair, I'm sure, Philippa," she said. "All the time Simplicity held his hand, and she said 'Death and Victory,' though it was

The Valley of the Great Shadow

me he told to say it. And now everybody's gone to the *friedhof*, and they wouldn't let me go."

"I haven't gone, dear. You shall stay with me." Philippa had hushed her to sleep, and her face, bent over Miss Busybody, was grave and purposeful.

The snow was melting in the valley, and the great gates of the pass were open. One by one the invalids were going away to the South. Some were going who were no longer invalids. It was good to see the bright faces and quick steps of those she had known in the winter hopeless and dying. They were now going away cured.

"Oh, Life, here is thy victory!" Philippa said Sonnie's watchword to herself as she thought of the groups of merry people that paced the balcony. Nearly all the *chaises longues* were empty. The sun had healed the sicknesses of some who had been sick. Some were going on to recovery. Some Death had carried already through the pass. Babette lay on the balcony still, but she was getting well. Her lungs were not diseased, and she would soon be able to go home and prepare for her marriage with Karl.

It was springtime in the valley. Everywhere there was a tinkle of dripping snow. The blue dome of the sky was draped with yellow rays.

Miss Busybody

The great shadow had floated high above the stars and melted in the sunlight.

The time had come for Philippa to make new plans. She was free to troop away with the happy troop into the valleys of the South. And yet she did not welcome her freedom. There was no stir in her veins. The blood ran chill when she thought of leaving the Mittenthal. The hands of the dead held her feet; the hands of the living were round her heart. She was loth to leave the place where she had tasted the agony of death and the bitterness of love. She thought of her father, and the empty aching in her heart cried aloud to stay where at least she might see his grave. She thought of Engel, and memory stood beside another grave. But Love was not there. He had risen.

"The pain has been good," Philippa whispered to herself. "It has taught me to understand life."

She would not have chosen differently if the choice had been in her hands. She was content to have loved this strange, solitary, great-soul who had shown her what life was. If he had loved her, her life would have been more complete; it could scarcely have been fuller. He had made it rich in possibilities.

"To love is better than to be loved," she knew. She lifted her head; a proud, noble light was on her face. It veiled her girlhood with a

The Valley of the Great Shadow

high mystery. "I am free now to go down into my vineyard and gather my purple grapes, and I don't want to go. I have trodden the winepress alone; and loneliness is better than laughter." Memory dimmed her eyes, but the tears did not fall.

She drew Miss Busybody closer to her, and a shadow was thrown across the high light in her face.

"If I had had a little child of my own—but I have only held a dead love in my arms."

She shook her head determinedly, and forced away the shadow. "Life is living," she told herself. She remembered how she had planned to live royally in some beautiful place; but the royal life was to be lived here in the Mittenthal, where Death held his court.

She had meant to drink the sweetness of life, but the sweetest draught was in the cup of pain. She had intended to be one of the great women of history. She had found that history often knew nothing of the greatest. She had hoped to listen to the song of the delight of life. She had heard a sweeter voice singing at dawn, and at noon, and at even—through all the hours of man's day—and the song was the song of sorrows. It struck deep into her soul, and great chords answered it. "Strength is a better gift than happiness," she thought. "We only know the sweetness of love by tasting its bitterness."

Miss Busybody

No, she would not leave the valley, where life struck its deep notes; where she might serve the lonely, the sick, and the dying. She would make her home here, and share Engel's work. In the life floating by with every season, changing as the tides change, there should be one little craft anchored in the valley beside which he could moor his own life.

He would need her, she knew. Some day Miss Busybody would be glad to have a woman friend who could take a mother's share in her thoughts.

Philippa's arms folded round the little body. She lifted her face, all wistful and tender, and met Engel's eyes, soft and full of a gentle pain, fixed upon her. He came into the room, nervously crushing his hat in his hand.

"I have come for—for my little girl."

He saw Philippa tighten her hold of the child.

"Oh, Dr. Engel! So soon? I don't know what I shall do without her."

He moved his hat from one hand to the other. "She had better come now, I think," he said, abruptly.

"Yes," said Philippa, under her breath. She looked at him with a dumb appeal in her eyes that he could not meet.

"Won't you sit down?" she said.

The commonplace words plumbed the depth of his heart.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

"Not now—I am busy," he said.

"It's such a pity—to wake her," Philippa said with a half-sob, "when 'Life is a watch or a vision between a sleep and a sleep.'"

Her voice swooned with an unexplained agitation. Engel's throat was strained to bursting. He could not take his eyes from the gracious womanhood that caressed Isolde's motherless child.

His silence drew the girl's face to his. The terrible hunger of love was in her eyes. Her glance fluttered about and found no resting-place. His eyes were flooded by waves of emotion. Broken-winged, her own eyes sought the shelter of the little child. Her breath came gustily. She pressed the child to her to hide the storm.

Miss Busybody woke, and sat up, rubbing her eyes. She smiled rosily.

"I'm velly glad to be awake. I had a bad dream. I thought I was all alone. Wasn't it a funny dream, Philippa, when I was here with you all the time?"

"Very funny, darling. And do you see that Dr. Engel is here, too?"

Miss Busybody laughed.

"And your voice is funny, too. Don't you like Dr. Engel, Philippa? Don't you think he is a nice man?"

The question snapped the tension between the

Miss Busybody

two. A little merry twinkle sat astride a tear, and pricked along Philippa's smile.

"Yes, I think Dr. Engel is a very nice man," she said. But the dawning gaiety fell from her face, rebuffed.

Engel bent down to the child.

"Come, Miss Busybody. I have come to take you home, to live with me. You are my little girl now."

The child threw herself back from him. Fear darted into her eyes. "No; I won't be your little girl. I don't want to live with you. I want to stay with Philippa."

She clung to Philippa, hiding her face on her breast. Engel's face changed.

"You are my own dear little girl," he said. "I want you to come and live with me. I want some one to play with."

"I'll give you my dollie, if you like. But you must be velly careful, for her arm is weak. You can play with her. But I'll stop with Philippa."

Miss Busybody's voice came muffled from the folds of Philippa's dress. "No, darling," said Philippa; "you must go with Dr. Engel. You are to be his little girl now."

"But I don't want to be it, Philippa. It's velly dull at Dr. Engel's house. There's only Angel John to play with."

There was an earnest trouble in the child's voice.

The Valley of the Great Shadow

"You shall have lots of dolls," said the Doctor. The restraint in his tones made them cruel in their hardness.

Miss Busybody gave him a sudden terrified glance. "I won't go," she cried. "I'm 'fraid of you. I don't like you to look at me so. Take me away; please take me away, Philippa." She clung to Philippa, her soft eyes big with terror and tears and entreaty.

Philippa's own eyes were full. She could only hold the child close to her. Presently her voice came back.

"Let me keep her, Dr. Engel. I would be so glad to adopt her; I am able to provide well for her."

"A promise to the dead is sacred," said Engel, unyieldingly. "She must come now. No use to repeat the scene. Come, Miss Busybody. You shall drive in my sleigh."

"I don't like sleighs. I want to stay with Philippa. Can't I, Philippa?"

Philippa shook her head.

Miss Busybody glanced from Engel to Philippa and back again, and there came on her face the expression that made Marie call her "the obstinate."

"I'm not going with you; I'm going to be Philippa's little girl."

"No, no, darling," Philippa said, brokenly. "You must go with Dr. Engel."

Miss Busybody

"I won't! I won't!" Miss Busybody sobbed. "He can have my dollie, but I won't go."

Engel was gazing at the child with a distressed, uncertain face, in which was an echo of the pain her mother had given him ten years before.

"A promise is a promise. I gave my word to her uncle," he said, hoarsely. "Come with me, sweetheart." His voice softened. "I love you very much, and I am very lonely."

"And I'm velly lonely if I haven't Philippa," said Miss Busybody. "I'll be dreffully lonely without Uncle Rob and Philippa. Truly, Dr. Engel, truly."

Engel turned and walked sharply to the window, and stood gazing out. Then he wheeled round. He had made his decision.

Miss Busybody's little face was swollen. The look in her eyes was pitiful. "Did you give my Uncle Rob the word of a genkilman?" she said, her lips still trembling.

"Yes."

"I wish you hadn't! I wish you hadn't!" she cried, passionately. "It wasn't velly fair not to ask me first." The tears dropped heavily down her cheek. "I'm 'fraid I'll have to go now," she said, with a despair that went to Engel's heart. "Boykin said a man can't ever break the word of a genkilman."

Then she flung herself again on Philippa, and

The Valley of the Great Shadow

clung to her, shaking. Philippa's sobs mingled with the child's.

At last Miss Busybody struggled up, and looked at Engel with swimming eyes.

"It's not velly fair to go away and leave Philippa all alone. She is crying, too. I think—I think you should tell Philippa to come, too."

The tense silence was broken by Engel.

"Will you come, too, Philippa?" he said, huskily.

Philippa's face was hidden.

"It would be better if you would come, Philippa," said Miss Busybody, earnestly. "You know you said he was a velly nice man."

"Will you come, Philippa?" Engel said again.

Philippa turned towards him. A radiant look shone through her tears.

"Do you mean it? Do you know what you are saying?"

"Mean it?" he said, in a shaking voice. "I want you, too, Philippa."

Simplicity and Jerningham, Miss Blake and the Professor, Karl and Babette, were all watching from different parts of the balcony. Jakob and Marie had just passed with Miss Busybody's box. The child was going to her new home; she walked between Engel and Philippa, holding a hand of each. The silence tossed her laugh

Miss Busybody

up to the balcony as she went by. She was chattering merrily.

"Yes. And you know the snow will soon be melted, and then we shall see the booful flowers again."

"My! If they don't look as if they were drinking glory!" Simplicity exclaimed.

"Then they have found the well in the valley," Jerningham answered.

"Can one believe in death in all this sunlight?" Miss Blake was saying. "Surely the great shadow has lifted, if only for a moment."

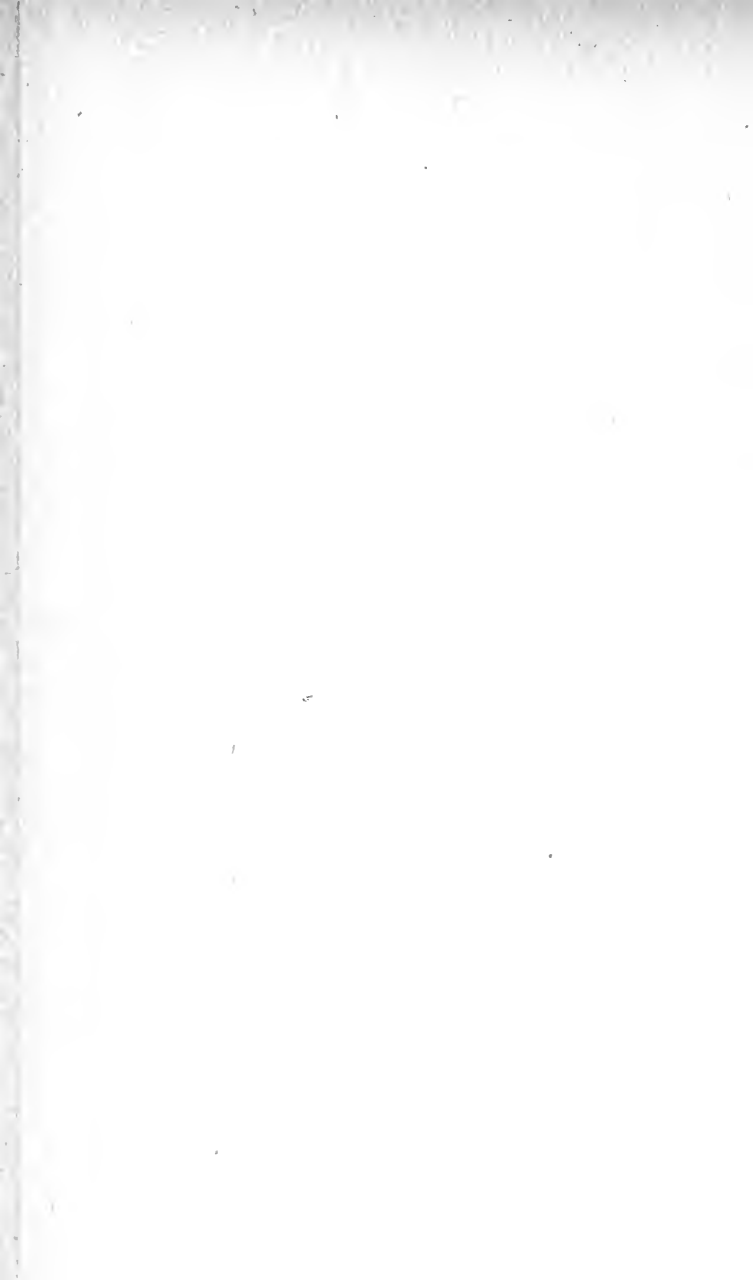
"There go two people who seem to believe in life!" The Professor nodded towards the road.

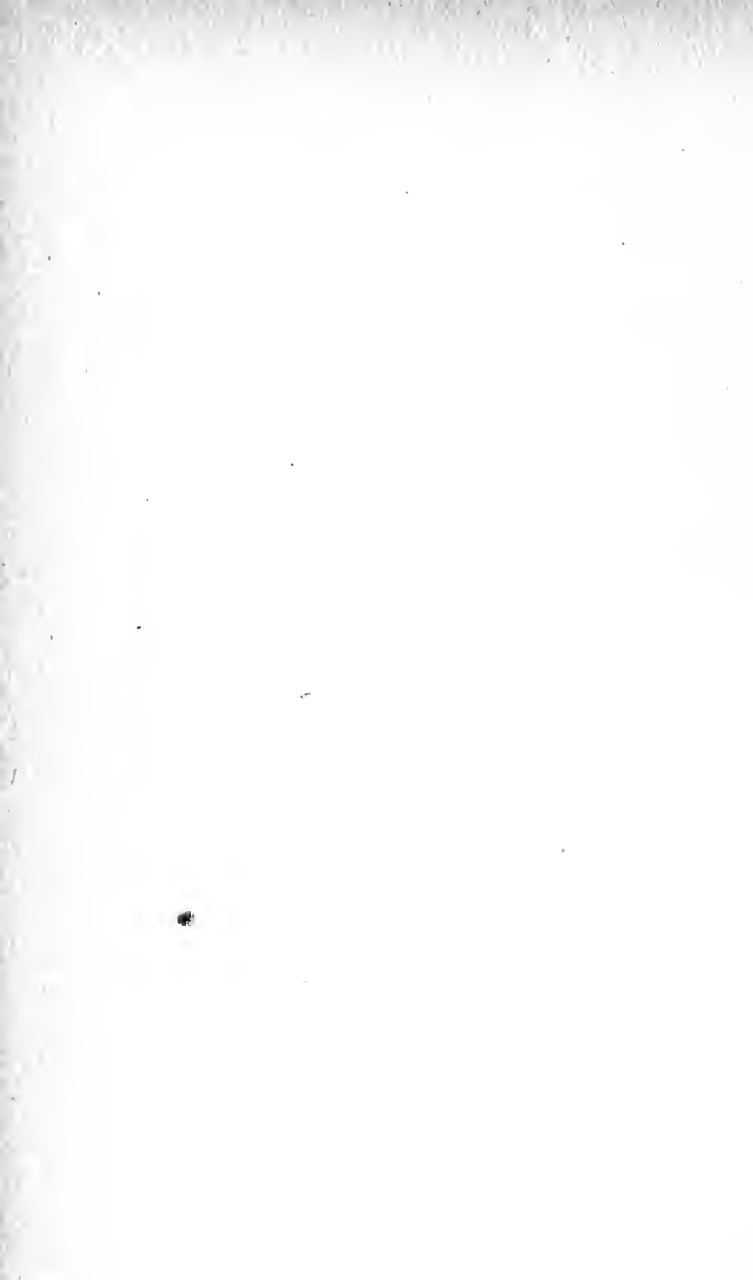
Miss Blake followed his eyes, her face shining.

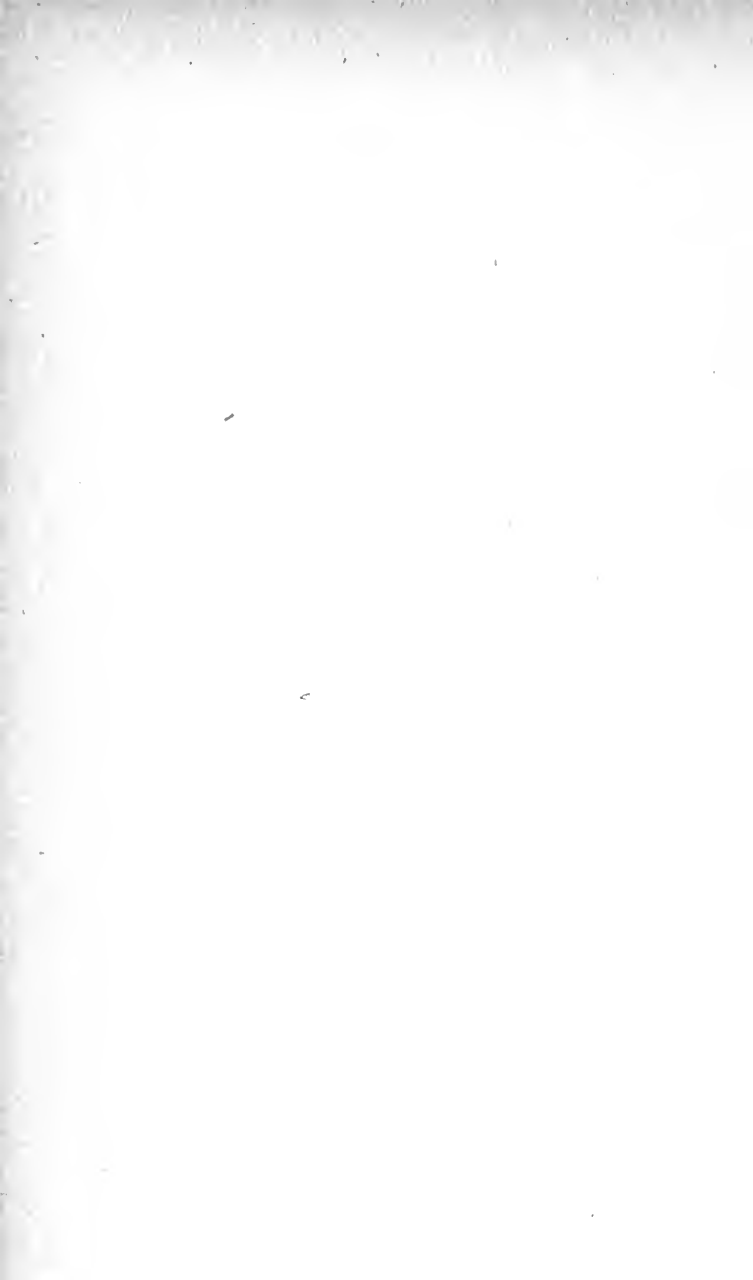
"And love," she added. "They believe in love. Life, Death, Love—these three. But the greatest of these is Love."

THE END.

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